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The PHANTOM DETECTIVE

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JULY

THE JEWELS OF DOOM

A Full Book-Length Novel

Featuring the Phantom Detective

G. WAYMAN JONES
ROBERT WALLACE
KERRY McROBERTS

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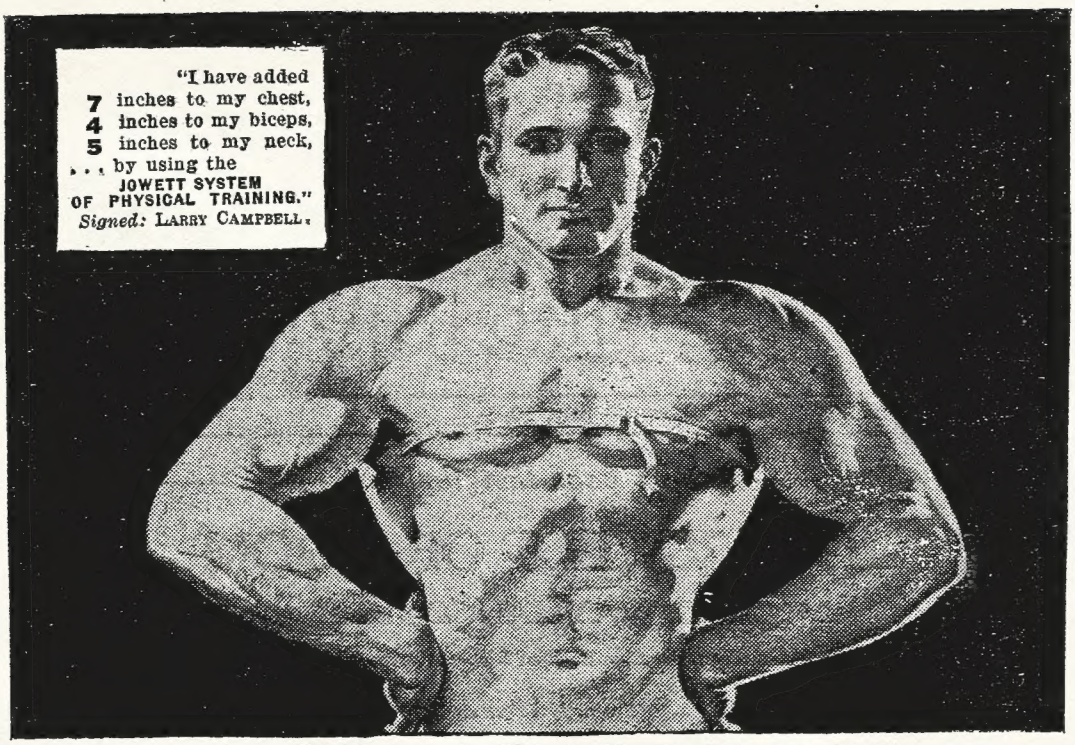
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A Full Book-Length Novel

THE JEWELS OF DOOM

By G. WAYMAN JONES

Taken From the Case-Book of Richard Curtis Van Loan

(Profusely Illustrated)

The Phantom Detective Pits His Strength and Ingenuity against the Fiendish Perpetrators of Sinister Criminal Machinations Originating in India and Involving American Gangdom—Bringing Death and Disaster in their Wake. *10*

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CHAPTER I

MURDER AT SEA!

THE black prow of the huge liner cut through the lashing green sea. About her the night and the fog conspired to obscure her way, as she fought on grimly through the pounding ocean toward the port of New York.

The fog, gray and impenetrable, hung over her like an intangible blanket, dripping and eerie, permeating the luxurious staterooms with its damp mist. Desperately her lights fought against the black and gray obscurity which swept the surging water. On the bridge three anxious men peered into the night—a night in which it seemed that Neptune had relinquished his realm to the Reaper, himself.

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By
G.
WAYMAN
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Taken from the Case-Book of Richard Curtis Van Loan

In the royal suite on A deck five men sat quietly before a steel strong box in the inner room. The men wore turbans, and their complexions were brown. In their sashes the jeweled hilts of their knives protruded.

These five Indians were silent. They spoke little as they solemnly and assiduously guarded their master's treasure box. None of them knew the combination of that safe, but all of them knew what was in it—the fabulous jewels of Paruana, that their master was bringing to America to sell.

Then of a sudden, through the silence of the room, there came a faint snapping sound. The quintette sat upright. Their hands fell to their knives. They raised their eyes from their intent contemplation of the strong box.

Then one of them cried out aloud:
"Allah! The safe door moves!"
Their eyes again stared at the

safe. No human hand was near it. Nothing touched its door. Yet that door moved. Almost imperceptibly for a moment, then with a staccato, crackling sound, the bolts snapped off like paper and the door swung open. At that moment the nearest man to the safe was fully four feet away.

NOW their knives were in their hands. And fear was in their hearts as they stared at the miracle which had happened before their very eyes. Within the safe that had opened so mysteriously, there gleamed and flickered in the electric light the magic gems of Paruana.

"Allah!" said another. "It is a miracle. It is—"

He never finished the sentence. As the awed Indians fought with their fears, the outer door of the suite opened and four masked men entered the room. Guns were in their hands, guns with long muzzles made longer by the silencers which were attached to them.

The Hindus stared at the invaders. One of the latter spoke in harsh English.

"If you guys take it easy, you won't get hurt," he said. "Now—"

But now that they were faced with something human, something tangible, the Indians regained their courage. After all, now they were not faced with any miracle. They were confronted with ordinary thieves, seeking to loot their master's property.

One brown man shouted a staccato order in his native tongue, and the five of them turned and charged on the invaders, their wicked knives flashing in the electric light of the chandelier.

But those savage Ghurka's knives, supreme in their own sphere, were no match for the ruthless automatics of the white men. Little yellow flames sprang from the barrels. Lead and steel ripped through the room, ripped through brown flesh, ripped through living tissue and rendered it dead and inert.

But one of the Indians got close enough to make a fight of it. He closed with his nearest adversary and his knife whirled through the air, but the white man seized it in his hand, wrenched it from the brown man's grasp and sank it deep in the owner's breast.

Then as the brown men lay inert and bloody on the deck, the four white men advanced grimly, purposefully toward the open safe.

* * *

The well dressed, cosmopolitan crowd in the smoking room was oblivious to any peril. An alcoholic merriment pervaded the atmosphere, as the passengers toasted the shipboard friendships which would come to an end on the morrow when the vessel docked at New York.

At the bar in the smoking room, a tall, dark-skinned man fingered a pony of Napoleon brandy. He drank it leisurely as he surveyed the people in the room. On his head he wore a white turban. His brown fingers glittered with jewels. And on his breast was pinned a magnificent emerald brooch, the symbol of sovereignty of the Rajah of Paruana.

Finishing his drink, the Indian turned slowly, walked from the room and took the elevator to A deck. He made his way with slow Oriental dignity to the Imperial suite at the stern of the ship. He flung the door open to find that the rooms were in darkness.

AN expression of annoyance crossed his face, and for an instant a shadow of apprehension crossed his heart. It was unthinkable that his retinue should have

retired before he had returned to his quarters. It was equally unthinkable that they had dared to desert their posts, to relax their vigilance over the treasure which the suite contained.

The prince's brown hand groped its way along the wall. A bejeweled finger touched the light switch. A faint click resounded and the darkness vanished.

The Indian stood on the threshold of the room, his eyes fixed in horror at the thing he saw. His finger remained on the light switch, as stark amazement froze him to immobility. His black eyes opened wide, and his heart picked up a beat.

On the deck of the cabin, three men lay prostrate and inert. One of them had a hole in his forehead from which blood poured prodigally on to the carpet. The others lay with lead slugs in their hearts, as the angel of death scourged the life from their bodies and took possession of the prone brown figures who wallowed in their own blood.

Then, abruptly, the turbaned man broke the paralysis which held him. Swiftly he shut the door of the stateroom. He turned the key in the lock. From the folds of his ornate Oriental costume he took a most Occidental blue-nosed automatic, and with a hard, grim expression in his eyes he made his way to the inner rooms.

HIS dining room was completely empty. But as he gained his sleeping quarters, he found himself face to face with Death once more.

Two more of his men lay there. One was stretched across the bed itself. The black polished handle of a knife protruded from his breast. The counterpane which once had been light red was stained to a deeper shade.

The second man, huddled on the floor, still held a curved blade in his hands, indicating that he had been faithful to his trust until the end. A bullet wound in his temple showed precisely how that end had come.

Then his eyes passed beyond the lifeless figures of his men and rested on what was the most astounding sight in the room. At the side of the bed, stood a safe—a safe of iron and steel that was impregnable to everything save the specific combination which would open it.

Now its door yawned wide on its hinges. Its locks were broken, shattered. The Indian knelt swiftly at its side and examined it. Each half of its locks was still in place. They were neatly smashed in half, as if some gigantic hand had snatched the steel door open, utterly disregarding the devices which were intended to insure its privacy.

TWO brown hands reached swiftly into the safe. An inner drawer was jerked open. It was empty. The Rajah rose. His lips were set in a thin, grim line. Again he turned his gaze from the interior of the smashed safe to the inert bodies of the Indians who lay dead in his suite.

"I expected the robbery," he said slowly to himself. "But this wholesale murder—"

He left the sentence unfinished, but the flashing rage in his black eyes expressed his meaning clearly enough.

He strode purposefully out of the suite toward the captain's quarters under the bridge. An idea had flashed through his mind. As long as the ship was at sea it was impossible for the killers to escape. They must still be aboard. With the captain's aid it was possible to capture the criminals ere the vessel reached her home port. Unconsciously he quickened his pace as the skip-

per's stateroom hove in sight. But it was already written in the indelible book of Fate, that he was never to reach there!

Something cold and hard pressed itself into the Indian's back. A hard voice with a pronounced American accent drawled into his ear.

"Don't reach for a weapon. Don't cry out. Walk ahead of me. If someone passes us, keep your mouth shut or you'll get a load of lead in your black body."

THE Rajah's eyes narrowed, but no other sign of emotion showed itself on his face. Realizing that the object which prodded into his back carried swift and relentless death in its magazine, he obeyed the other's orders without protest.

Two more men came up, and with dexterous hands bound the brown man's wrists and ankles as they carried him toward the rail. The man with the gun held its unwavering muzzle against the victim's temple to ensure his silence.

They made their way along the deserted, stormy deck.

At the rail by the stern they came to a halt. In an instant his bonds were unloosed. Without removing his weapon from the other's side, one of them reached down and picked up a lifebelt. He handed it to the Indian.

"Put that on and jump," he commanded.

The Indian stared at him, bewildered.

"Is it not enough," he said bitterly, "that you have stolen my jewels, that you have slain my retainers? Must you kill me, too?"

The man with the gun, a hard-faced, rat-eyed individual, grinned mirthlessly. "You won't die," he said. "There's a boat off the port side to pick you up."

The Indian strained his eyes through the night and the fog. Off to the port a thin light flickered through the obscurity which veiled the sea. The gun thrust itself suggestively into his ribs again.

"Go ahead," said the white man. "Jump."

The Indian looked at him for a moment. He saw neither mercy nor indecision in the white man's eyes. He cast a frantic glance about the deck in search of help. But the stern was utterly deserted.

"Jump," said the white man again.

The Rajah hesitated no longer. Agilely he climbed the rail, then leaping wide to clear the thrashing screws, he plunged into space. The sea, the night and the fog closed about him.

CHAPTER II

KIDNAPPED

THE Indian's brown head appeared above the waves for an instant, then a roaring breaker swept him under. He struggled desperately against the fury of the sea. As he came up he saw the twinkling lights of the liner disappearing steadily in the distance. The churning water of its wake foamed angrily about him.

He breathed deeply, and struck out with strong strokes toward another light which was closer now than those of the ship. They came toward each other slowly. Then through the night he heard a hail.

"Ahoy, there!"

The Indian cried out loudly in order to guide the boat toward him. The light became more clearly defined as the ship approached. Then black against the blackness of the night, a bow cut the water less than six feet away from him.

Like an angry snake a line hit the

Van prepared to don the unconscious man's garments.

water, writhing in the hissing sea. The Indian seized it gratefully, and a moment later was hauled aboard the sea-swept deck of a cutter. Exhausted and panting, the Indian tore the lifebelt from his shoulders and turned to face a blue uniformed man whose officer's cap held the badge of authority.

"What does this mean?" he demanded in precise, dignified English. "You shall all be arrested for this. This is an outrage. This—"

The blue uniformed man disregarded him.

"Take him below," he said to a pair of sailors. "Feed him. Give him anything he wants. But lock his door and stay on guard outside his cabin. Don't let him get away."

The sailors stepped forward and laid rough hands on the person of the mighty Indian prince, whom a thousand untouchables of his own race, dared not even raise their eyes to. Arrogantly and with flashing eyes, he swept the seamen's hands from his person.

"Dogs," he said. "Keep your filthy hands off me."

The sailors stepped back and glanced at their commander for

further orders. An evil smile crossed the captain's face.

"Let him have it," he said grimly.

One of the sailors stepped in, his right fist drawn back for a blow. His arm traveled forward, but his fist never reached its objective. With an alacrity, amazing in a man of his age, the Rajah stepped inside the other's guard, parried the blow with his left arm, swung his right in a short arc.

THE brown fist caught the white man at the point of the jaw. Silently he fell. Behind the Indian, the skipper's features took on an expression of stark rage. He bent swiftly and picked up a marline spike. It hurtled silently through the air, then thudded sickenly upon the Indian's skull.

The brown man's knees crumpled. His body swayed forward. He fell unconscious on the deck. The ship progressed some three hundred miles before he regained his senses.

* * *

The room to which he had been carried was neatly furnished and filled with a haze of smoke. Three men sat there, lounging in their seats. One of them, fat and portly, yet with an appearance of brutal force apparent in his features, seemed to be the dominant figure of the room. A thin, dapper man on the window seat took a long inhalation at his cigar and spoke nervously.

"I still think it's a mad scheme, Charters," he said. "How the hell are we going to dispose of the stuff? Not a fence'll touch them now that the story of the robbery's out. We're stuck with a fortune in jewels that we can never dispose of."

The fat man addressed as Charters turned a calm, supercilious glance upon the other.

"Who said we're going to offer them to a fence?" he asked.

A puzzled frown crossed the thin man's brow at these words. The third man present sat upright in his chair.

"Well, what *are* we going to do with them?" he asked in a tone heavy with irony. "Keep 'em to look at when we feel blue?"

Charters turned on him angrily.

"If you don't like the way I'm handling this," he snapped, "you can get out of it now—both of you. I'll give you twenty grand cash apiece for your ends. Now what do you say?"

The two men stared at each other. Uneasiness trickled through their pose of nonchalance. The thin man spoke hesitantly.

"Now, Charters," he said in a compromising tone. "We don't want to get out. We're just asking you what the next move is. What are we going to do with the jewels?"

Charters smiled quietly. For a long moment he regarded the end of his cigar. Then at last he spoke with the air of a man delivering himself of a bombshell statement—as indeed he was.

"We're taking 'em back to India," he announced.

The other two men stared at him as if he had suddenly gone mad. The thin man opened his mouth as if to speak, then he caught a glimpse of movement in the corner of his eye. His original words froze on his lips. Instead he said: "Careful, I think his nobs is coming to."

THREE pair of eyes focused themselves on the floor in a dark corner of the room. There, bound with cruel cord, lay a turbaned brown figure. His eyes flashed angrily through the darkness, and the weakness that had come upon him during his harsh imprisonment

in no wise lessened the flaming spirit inside the man.

"Release me," he said angrily. "You dogs shall pay for this. You—"

"Shut up," said Charters wearily. His pudgy hand stretched forth and touched a button on the wall. A white coated man appeared from another room.

"Untie him," ordered Charters. "Then feed him. Give him a shot of whisky, too. We got to keep him in good shape."

The thin man eyed his superior keenly.

"What for?" he demanded as the Indian was being led from the room.

Charters puffed lightly on his cigar, but vouchsafed no answer. Winton, the thin man, stared at him, and a puzzled expression clouded the black eyes of the third man, known to the police of three continents as Louie Senton. It was Senton who broke the tense silence which had seemed to grip them after Charters' last words.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded. "I don't like to work in the dark. First you make a crack about taking the stuff back to India where it came from. Now you talk about keeping that Indian in good shape. When I went into this I thought it was a straight jewel robbery for tremendous stakes. Now what's it all about?"

CHARTERS shifted his bulky body in the chair and gazed steadily into Louie's eyes. The latter shifted uneasily, then dropped his gaze. Charters spoke slowly, deliberately, but behind the easy casualness of his words was an unspoken ominous threat.

"You mugs will know all you have to know," he said. "You're in this thing for dough. All right, you'll get it. But as regards knowing the plans you'll hear them when the Big Guy gets ready to spill them. Even Conners and I don't know what's going on."

He left the sentence unfinished, but in his tone there was a challenge which neither of the others cared to accept. They both were well aware of the fact that Charters, despite his easy going attitude, was a dangerous man, quick to draw and quicker to shoot when his authority was questioned. Not for nothing was he the chief lieutenant of the king of the underworld whom he referred to as the Big Guy.

Then behind them suddenly came the sound of a door slamming. The three men exchanged glances significantly, and a stiff tension seemed to make itself felt in the room. Even Charters seemed to lose some of his easy nonchalance. He took the cigar from his mouth and jammed it out in a silver ash tray.

"It's Conners," he announced. "Now maybe you guys will find out just what's what."

CHAPTER III

Conners' Enemy

HE WAS tall, dark and saturnine; and his name was Conners. He was no ordinary man, as the police could well testify. His eyes were black and deep set, cold, almost piscatorial, relentless. They were the eyes of a man to whom murder means little, if it is necessary to his plans.

His face bore a jagged knife scar across it from forehead to chin. His teeth were even, sharp, lupine. He stood on the threshold of the room staring at his three henchmen who returned his gaze uncomfortably. When he spoke, his voice was quiet, but a repressed quivering rage lay beneath his tone. A menace and a

threat lived violently behind his words.

"You fools," he said. "You've almost ruined everything. You've almost cost me a cool million. You've almost cost yourselves your lives. The Big Shot's sore as hell."

Louie Senton and Winton glanced at Charters. The fat man cleared his throat uneasily. When he spoke his voice was a different thing than it had been before. Its contemptuous indifference had evolved to deference.

"Why now, Conners?" he said. "We've done our job as you laid it out. We got the stuff. We got the Indian. We—"

"The hell you did," said Conners.

CHARTERS stared at him wide eyed, frankly puzzled.

"But we have, chief," he said. "The stuff is in the safe in the bedroom."

"Where's the Indian?"

Charters jerked a pudgy thumb toward the kitchen.

"Out there. He just came out of his hop. He's getting a bite to eat."

"So," said Conners slowly. "Then how do you account for the fact that I saw with my own eyes the Rajah of Paruana less than an hour ago?"

Charters' eyes opened yet wider.

"Where?"

"At the Regal Hotel, where he's staying under an alias. I checked up on that after I'd seen him. Oh, he's there all right. It was him. Now how the hell did he get away from you? What slipped up?"

"But," said Charters desperately, "he didn't slip away from us. He's in the kitchen, chief. You must have made a mistake."

"I don't make mistakes," said Conners coldly. "If you've got someone in there, it's not the Rajah."

"Then who is it?"

"I don't know," said Conners grimly. "But I mean to find out. Bring him in."

A MOMENT later the Indian was escorted into the room by Charters. The latter held an automatic aimed at the brown man's heart. The Prince, sullen and apparently still outraged by the indignities which had been heaped upon him, glared at his captors.

"Pigs!" he cried. "Release me. I demand that—" He broke off and launched into his native tongue. English was not equal to the exigencies of the occasion.

Conners eyed him coldly. Charters, with a look of relief on his chubby face, glanced at the Big Guy. Senton and Winton smiled as if the tension which had gripped them was now passed.

When the Rajah had finished speaking, Conners said: Very pretty, indeed." Then he took a step forward. His snapping black eyes thrust themselves within six inches of the Indian's face. "But who are you?" he barked.

The Indian appeared bewildered. He shrugged his shoulders.

"You know very well who I am," he began.

"That's the Rajah all right, chief," said Charters.

"Shut up," snapped Conners. "He's a fake. You've got the wrong man. And by God, this brown mug'll come clean or I'll kill him. I'll—"

But before he could complete the threat, the brown man did a startling thing.

At his side, Charters, who despite his chief's words, was not sure that Conners was wrong, had relaxed his vigilance, had sunk again into his natural lethargic attitude. The automatic dropped lazily in his hand, its barrel pointing harmlessly to the floor.

A brown hand moved with lightning speed. In a single flashing gesture it snatched the weapon from Charters' inert fingers. Then, steadily held in the brown hand, the automatic covered the room. Now the Rajah had thoroughly lost his sense of outraged dignity. His eyes flashed with faint mockery and a slight smile was on his lips.

Conners hurled a rapid oath at Charters, then faced the Indian with the gun.

"Don't be a fool," he said. "You can't get out of here. We'll talk things over."

The Indian shook his head and when he spoke his voice was of an entirely different timbre than it had been before.

His thick oriental accent had vanished. He spoke pure and colloquial English.

"We're through talking, Conners," he said. "Now's the time for action. If you hadn't accidentally blundered upon the real Prince of Paruana, things would have been simplified. However, there's still time to wreck your schemes."

CONNERS gaped at him for a moment.

Then he turned and glared at the other three.

"You fools," he shouted. "I knew you'd blundered. You've wrecked the whole scheme. You've—"

"But we've got the jewels, chief," put in Charters anxiously. "That's the main thing."

Conners' eyes caught those of his henchmen, and if ever murder was written in a man's gaze, it was in his then. His voice came low and tense, as Conners fought for control of the terrible rage which swept him.

"You idiot," he said harshly. "Don't you see that the whole deal's been a plant. The jewels are phoney.

"We're through talking, Conners!"

The Rajah's phoney. It was all planted to make the real jewels and the real Rajah safe from us. We've been tricked."

The brown man with the gun smiled quietly.

"You're right, Conners," he said. "Your usually quick mind has told you the truth. The jewels are phoney and the Rajah is phoney. And the plan was concocted to throw you off the trail of the genuine stuff. But now that you've discovered it's all a fake, I'll have to take other steps to insure the safety of the gems."

Now Conners was beside himself with fury. Only the unwavering point of the automatic which was trained on his heart prevented him from leaping at this mocking figure who taunted him with his failure—

failure on the biggest job he had ever attempted.

Yet he moved even closer to the weapon which covered him.

"Listen," he said. "I don't know who you are. That doesn't matter. But some day, I'll kill you. Kill you with my own hands. As long as you live, you can fear death. Death which shall be delivered by me personally."

THE Indian, still smiling, backed slowly toward the door of the apartment.

"I hear you, Conners," he said. "But I've been threatened with death before. It doesn't frighten me. But now I've got work to do. I'll see you later when you're arrested. Good-by."

Then Charters, who had been paralyzed to silence by this bewildering turn of events, found his voice.

"But for God's sake," he cried to the room at large. "We found him on the right ship. We found him in the Rajah's suite, traveling under the Rajah's name. If he's not the Rajah, who in the name of Heaven is he?"

The turbaned brown man paused on the threshold, his back to the door.

Behind him his left hand touched the knob.

"Ah," he said softly, with a slight bow, and his eyes were mocking as he spoke. "I'm sorry I neglected to introduce myself, gentlemen, for I'm afraid that we're destined to meet again, and we should know each other."

"Stop clowning," said Conners harshly:

"Who the hell are you?"

"I?"

The brown man raised his eyebrows, and his eyes bored into Conners' over the muzzle of his gun. "*I am the Phantom!*"

CHAPTER IV

A Desperate Struggle

THEN as his fingers tightened around the brass doorknob and opened it slightly, the eyes of Conners lost their expression of startled surprise and lit up with a vague hope. The Phantom saw that light and read its meaning correctly.

Swiftly he sidestepped and ducked. A blackjack hurtled through the air passed his head, wielded by the hand of the servant who had just fed him.

The Phantom straightened up and swung his revolver at his assailant with all his strength. It struck the man on his temple and he sank silently to the floor. Behind him he heard Conners shout.

"Get him! Now!"

Three hands dropped to three hips. Three dull revolver barrels appeared, their ominous muzzles pointing at the brown man who stood in the doorway. Half a dozen staccato shots rang out and four of them spat viciously from the barrel of the brown man's gun.

Winton's weapon spun from his hand to the floor. A scream of pain sounded shrill and obligato to the shooting. Then with a sudden deft movement, the Phantom was outside the door. The portal slammed shut behind him.

He raced frantically toward the stairway which loomed before him. He was about to descend, when he saw a pair of hard-faced men stare up at him from the bottom of the staircase. Undoubtedly two of Conners' bodyguard who waited there for their chief.

Now behind him the door of the apartment he had just quitted opened. Conners and his two henchmen appeared.

"Stop him boys," cried Conners.

"It's the Phantom!"

Now he had no choice. The Phantom whirled around the bannister as half a dozen revolver shots whined over his head and raced up toward the roof.

Footsteps pounded on the stairs behind him.

HE gained the top flight and emerged a moment later in the cool, fragrant night air. Swiftly he sped across the roof, then of a sudden his foot caught in some unseen wire and he stumbled. As he arose he heard a soft patter behind him. He turned swiftly to see a hand upraised in the air. The hand held a vicious looking blackjack, which swished the air as it descended in a line for his skull.

He moved his head slightly, and an instant later was aware of a thudding ache in his shoulder as the blackjack missed its mark by inches. His own hand, which still held his revolver in it, swung swiftly and cracked against his assailant's chin. The man uttered a sharp cry of pain, and the blackjack dropped from his hand.

Two strong arms flung themselves about him, as a third man hurled himself into the fray. So busy had the Phantom been with the other that he had not heard the approach of his ally.

He thrust his hands over his own shoulders and seized his unseen opponent by the coat collar, then, hunching his back, he lurched forward, executing a scarcely remembered piece of jiu-jitsu. A black figure went hurling over his head, and landed with a thud upon the roof.

And now the man who had attacked him originally returned to give battle. He grappled with him just behind the doorway which led from the apartment house. As they closed there, the brown man suddenly heard the sound of running feet on the staircase within, as Conners and his other pair of cutthroats came up to render aid to his henchmen. The door was abruptly flung open. It struck the brown man's assailant in the back and knocked the pair of them sprawling on the roof.

In an instant the Phantom was on his feet again before his assailant could recover. He raced to the edge of the roof. The top of the neighboring building was a sheer drop of twenty feet. A chasm some ten feet wide yawned between the two buildings. Behind him came the shout of his pursuers. Feet raced behind him across the roof.

The Phantom did not hesitate. He tensed his muscles and sprang like a mountain goat into space. With a jar that shook his whole body, he landed on the other roof. Behind him a volley of shots split the night as the others hesitated before the perilous leap which confronted them.

The disguised man picked himself up and ran toward the doorway, which led to the stairs. He disappeared through it and charged at top speed down the stairway. Realizing that the others would immediately run to the street to cut him off that way, his legs moved in high, in a desperate endeavor to beat them to the street.

A WEIRD brown disheveled figure, he passed through the lobby. A bulky uniformed doorman essayed to stop this strange apparition that had appeared from nowhere, but with a tremendous shove the Phantom pushed him aside and gained the street.

A moment later he threw himself, panting and exhausted, into a passing cab.

"The Regal Hotel!" he shouted to the driver. "And go like hell!"

The taxi raced through the streets while its strange passenger recovered his breath within.

He realized quite well that now time was a most important factor. Conners' men, as soon as they saw the false Rajah escape, would undoubtedly head at once for the Regal in order to retrieve their initial error, in order to obtain the real jewels and the real Rajah.

WELL, it seemed that the Phantom now had enough of a start to beat his enemies to the hotel. His thoughts were suddenly brought to an abrupt stop as he suddenly realized that the cab was crawling at a snail's pace through the streets.

He leaned forward and addressed the driver.

"What's wrong? We've got to make better time than this."

The chauffeur shrugged massive shoulders.

"Sorry, boss," he said. "There's a fire up the street. Traffic's tied up."

Van swore under his breath and peered out the window. The big red trucks of the fire department completely blocked the way some few feet ahead.

With an exclamation of annoyance, he stepped from the cab, paid the driver and ran up the block. Once past the fire engines he engaged another cab. But by now he was apprehensive. That delay might well have proved costly. Already the enemy might be at the Regal, undoing all the work that the Phantom had accomplished.

A gaudily arrayed commissionaire opened the door of the cab, and stared with well-bred amazement at the strange figure which burst from the vehicle, flung a bill to the driver and ran madly into the lobby.

The elevator deposited him on the fourteenth floor. He sped through the corridors to the imperial suite. He banged staccato on the door. There was no reply. He knocked once more before he produced a skeleton key from his clothes and fitted it into the lock.

The door swung open and he entered. Swiftly he ran through the suite, glancing hastily in every room. There was no sign of life. Then as he gained the living room, he stood staring in wonder upon the threshold. Staring at apodictic evidence that Conners had beaten him here.

For there, beneath a table in the corner, stood a safe. Its door yawned wide open, hanging crazily on its hinges. Its locks had been snapped in twain like paper. The interior of the safe was completely empty.

HE crossed the floor and kneeling before the safe examined it. Its shattered locks were smashed in exactly the same manner as his own safe had been on the boat.

He rose slowly, shaking his head. If Conners was in possession of some device that could crack a steel lock like tinder there was no limit to the criminal depredations which would be possible to the gang.

A faint sound came to his ear, and he froze to silent immobility where he stood. The noise sounded once more, and now his alert brain placed it as the cautious turning of a key in a lock.

Apparently there were others besides himself who carried skeleton keys. That would explain how Conners had entered and taken both the Rajah and the jewels before he arrived. It would also explain the person who even now was entering the Rajah's suite.

Instinctively, his hand dropped to

his gun. He crossed the room on silent feet. He removed his shoes. Then he recrossed the room and took up his position behind a draping curtain which hung from the bedroom door.

The other door opened with an almost imperceptible sound. The thick rug in the foyer deadened the footfall which the Phantom's sixth sense told him was advancing. He peered from the side of the curtain into the living room.

A single hand appeared through the doorway—a hand that held a .38 which covered the entire room. Slowly emerging from the hall behind the weapon came the face of Louie Senton.

The man's eyes opened wide as he stared across at the window curtains of the living room. For there showed at the bottom of the drapes, a pair of feet.

Senton stared for an instant at those shoes, then an evil smile lit his face. He lifted his gun resolutely. His finger pressed the trigger. Half a dozen shots emerged from the muzzle of his gun, their reverberations effectively reduced to a deadened puff by the silencer affixed to the muzzle of his weapon.

The curtain moved convulsively, as the wicked steel plowed its way through the cloth. Louie Senton's smile grew broader. Now he advanced fearlessly into the room.

He caught sight of his own face in a pier glass. A cocky smile enveloped his features. "So," he said aloud. "It took Louie Senton to get the Phantom after half the underworld had failed."

He crossed to the windows, and with a glint of triumph in his eyes, he jerked back the drapes to gaze at the fallen body of the man who, for so long, had struck fear into the hearts of the underworld.

Then the triumph left his eyes. The smile froze on his face, and the victory in his heart turned to a terrible fear. For Louie Senton found himself gazing at nothing more than an empty pair of shoes and a bullet riddled curtain.

And now behind him, a dread ominous voice said: "Put up your hands!"

CHAPTER V

"Drop Your Gun!"

LOUIE SENTON obeyed the command slowly. Even more slowly he turned around. The voice said again: "Drop your gun!"

Louie Senton's hand opened. His weapon clattered down to the floor. His face was now a study in panic as he gazed at the dishevelled brown man who held the crook's life in his hand at this moment.

The Phantom approached him. Still holding his weapon steadily aimed at the other's heart, he proceeded to run his left hand through Senton's pockets, in the hope that he might find some clue, some information which would once again lead him to the trail of Conners.

For a moment, as that searching hand ran through his outer pockets, Senton made no move. He submitted to the ordeal without demurring. Then when the Phantom's hand reached for the wallet in his inside coat pocket, he decided to stake all on a single desperate move.

He brought his left hand down from above with terrific force toward the muzzle of the pistol which held him at bay, in order to knock the barrel away from his heart. Though his movement was fast, it was yet not fast enough.

It was merely lucky for him, in that moment, that the Phantom had no desire to kill wantonly. Had

he been as ruthless, as merciless as the gangsters he was fighting, Louie Senton would have been a dead man on the instant.

However, instead of constricting his finger on the trigger of the gun, the Phantom brought up his left fist and swung in a short, savage arc at the other's jaw. Senton's left struck the gun barrel, knocking it aside, and as he did so his body came forward slightly.

The blow aimed at his jaw struck too far back as a consequence. It made a stinging contact with his ear.

Then Senton closed. His left hand grasped the wrist that wielded the gun.

His right clawed for his brown adversary's throat.

His clutching fingers closed hard around his enemy's windpipe. Now, once more, the Phantom swung his left, hard and wickedly. This time it struck its mark, squarely and with terrific force.

The hand on his throat lost its tensity.

Senton stumbled back, his left hand releasing its hold on the revolver.

The Phantom, swift to follow up his advantage, dropped his gun into his pocket and came through with a smashing right to the jaw ere the other could recover.

WITH a low groan, Senton fell to the floor, his knees buckling under him, his eyes wide and glazed, his mind rendered impotent by unconsciousness.

The other man in the room regarded him for a moment, then he crossed to the telephone and called the police.

And when Louie Senton recovered consciousness, it was to realize that he was booked to spend the next ten years in prison.

CHAPTER VI

The Lone Wolf

HIGH up in a Park Avenue penthouse a weary, panting man sat before the mirror of a dressing table. From the glass before him a brown face stared. A turban was mounted on his head, and a small trickle of blood ran down his cheek.

The man sighed wearily. This was the first moment of relaxation he had been able to achieve in the past forty-eight hours. Then, after a moment, his brown fingers dipped themselves into a jar of cold cream, and smeared the stuff upon his face.

The face that gazed back at him from the mirror underwent a strange and gradual evolution. Beneath the magic of the cold cream the brown vanished and was replaced by tanned Caucasian features. A drop of white liquid in the eyes changed their color slightly. The removal of the turban disclosed wavy brown hair. An infectious grin revealed even white teeth. And now, the Indian who had entered the apartment a few moments ago was a white man!

Richard Curtis Van Loan donned a dressing gown, lighted a cigarette and threw himself in his favorite armchair. His brow wrinkled in a frown, as he considered the events of the past two days, as he recapitulated the metamorphoses of his battle with Conners, as he reviewed the situation as a general overlooks the field ere resuming the battle.

Solitude stimulated thought with him, and solitude was the natural concomitant of the career which Van Loan had chosen. Of necessity the Phantom was not a gregarious creature. His profession precluded that. With the exception of Frank Havens, the newspaper publisher,

who had started him on his adventurous trail, he could call no one friend. He could trust no one.

He was forever a lone wolf, with his life dedicated to a never-ending war on crime and evil. He was a masked knight of righteousness who must forego all normal modes of living as a sacrifice to his abnormal existence.

Born to society and wealth, the war had taught him the utter futility of the pampered life he had led in his youth. On the flaming Western Front he had learned to grapple with death daily in the air, as his pounding crate scourged the enemy's lines — further, he had learned to like it.

Peace-time adjustment was hard —impossible. That was the reason that he had so eagerly accepted Havens' suggestion that he embark on the career of the Phantom, to assume the rôle of the enemy of crime whose very name struck fear and terror into the hearts of the underworld.

Characteristically, he had flung himself wholeheartedly into this new venture. Unsparingly, he had thrown himself into the studies of subjects which would make his sleuthing art perfect.

AND now his histrionic ability, his talent for makeup and disguise were surpassed by no professional actor. He had cultivated a natural gift for ventriloquism and mimicry which had stood him in good stead on more than one occasion. He had but to hear a voice once in order to imitate it perfectly.

Thus it was that Richard Curtis Van Loan, yclept, though not known as, the Phantom, had succeeded so well in his tasks when other detectives had failed. He had perfected his art to such a degree that never yet had he undertaken a task which he had failed to perform.

And as he sat there smoking quietly this night, it occurred to him that in the matter of Conners and the Rajah's jewels, victory seemed to be a simple thing. With the knowledge he had already acquired, with the address of the criminal's headquarters in his pocket, his task would be completed swiftly and without danger. He lit another cigarette and smiled complacently at the thought.

BUT had he known what jeopardy a perverse fate held in store for him, what peril lurked along the trail ere he should reach its end, his smile would have vanished, and every ounce of inherent fighting spirit which he possessed would have been taxed to keep him in the desperate struggle which was destined to occur before Conners, the relentless killer, should strike down his last victim.

Then suddenly he arose. Tired as he was, he realized that he had little time to waste. True, there were certain factors of the case which were beyond his understanding. Why Conners was planning to return the jewels to India whence they had just come, was something of a mystery. How the master crook had managed to break open those two safes, so cleanly, sans explosive or jimmy, was also inexplicable.

But with that slip of paper in his pocket that he had taken from Louie Senton, it seemed that these matters should be easily cleaned up; and that the Rajah would be freed, his jewels rescued and Conners and his men landed safely behind the bars.

He jammed out his cigarette in a silver tray and once more seated himself before the dressing table.

His slim, deft fingers applied

grease paint to his face, and as the dexterously applied makeup changed his appearance his mind was still busy with the case.

WHEN some weeks ago he had been called in by the representatives of a great power to impersonate the Rajah of Paruana on his ocean voyage, to bring the imitation jewels to New York to throw the thieves off the trail, he had not regarded the case as important. It was more of a lark to him than anything else.

True, he had been told that if the Rajah failed to sell his rare gems he would be bankrupt, impoverished, and his power over his border province greatly weakened. Also, he had been informed that certain enemies had designs on the prince's power, designs which were frowned on by the British Government and other powers of the world. That was the chief reason the Phantom had been called in.

It had been decided that if he took the Indian's place and with the real Rajah's retinue brought the fake jewels to New York, that would effectively checkmate any enemies who had designs on the invaluable collection of jewels.

And had it not been for the accident of Conners spying the real Rajah at his hotel, the plan would probably have worked. However, with circumstances standing as they did now, Van worried little about the failure. It seemed to him that now Conners had been delivered into his hands and in a few moments he was to sally forth to claim his victory.

The fingers still manipulated the grease paint over the clean-cut features. And now a startling change came over the face that stared from the mirror. Its eyes were snapping black. Its cheeks were scarred, and even his own mother would have sworn that it was the countenance of Louie Senton.

Completing his disguise Van Loan rose from the mirror, changed into the suit that he had taken from the man who had tried to murder him, and entered a private elevator which deposited him, unobserved, into the street.

On the corner he put in a call to police headquarters and gave some terse but explicit instructions to Inspector Rolph at the other end of the wire. Then with an automatic in his pocket, and an exultant heart beating in his breast, he set off to put the finishing touches to the career of Conners.

It was night when his taxi deposited him before a large old brownstone house in what had once been a select residential section of the city. He paid off the driver, and boldly mounted the steps. His finger pressed a bell at the side of the door.

A moment later a sliding panel in the door slid back and a pair of beady eyes gazed at him through the aperture.

"Oh," said a voice. "It's you, Louie."

Van nodded. "It's me, all right," he said. "Let me in quick. I've got to see Conners. Is he in?"

The door swung slowly open. The hunchback guard made a gesture of affirmation.

"Yeah," he said. "He's in. He's having a heavy conference with some of those Indians."

Van pushed his way past the other and walked briskly down a long hall. At the far end of it, a door was open. Van hesitated on the threshold, then entered.

Within were three men. Two of them—Charters and Conners—he had seen before. The third man was

Conners shouted: "Get the jewels and the Indian away. Fast, now!"

an Indian, turbaned and bejeweled. As he entered Conners looked up and spoke to him eagerly.

"Did you do the job, Louie?"

Van answered in a perfect imitation of Senton's voice.

"Yeah," he said grimly. "There's one guy that won't bother us any more."

THE Indian shot him a swift glance, a gleam of satisfaction in his black eyes.

"The Phantom? He is dead?"

"Dead as a doornail," said the man who looked like Louie Senton. "I gave it to him twice through the heart in the hotel."

"Good," said the Indian. He turned to Conners. "Now we can continue with our plans. You will receive the money as soon as you deliver the jewels to us in Calcutta. Is that satisfactory?"

Conners nodded slowly. He said: "It's satisfactory, Hari. But I don't see why you can't take 'em now, instead of making me take them to Calcutta."

Hari Singh shook his head.

"No," he said. "We cannot take the risk. The robbery of the gems is known to the police. They will be on the lookout for them. You are being well paid. You must get them to Calcutta."

Conners shrugged. "All right," he said. "For the money you're spending, you're entitled to service; I'll admit that. You want his Nibs, as well?"

Hari Singh shot a swift glance toward a dark corner of the room. Van's eyes followed his gaze, and now for the first time he saw a dark huddled figure lying on the floor.

His hands were cruelly bound with cord behind his back. A gag was jammed in his mouth.

"If he will sign abdication papers we do not want him. If he refuses, you just deliver him to us at Calcutta, also."

Conners nodded again.

"Bring him over here, Louie," he said. "We'll talk to him."

Van hastily crossed the room. He lifted the prostrate figure to its feet, took the gag from the man's mouth, and escorted the real Prince of Paruana toward the table.

"Untie him," said Conners.

Van took a knife from his pocket and slashed the Rajah's bonds. He took the gag from his mouth. At his side Charters took a revolver from his pocket and covered the prince, to prevent a sudden dash for freedom.

The Rajah of Paruana rubbed his numbed wrists for a moment to restore the circulation, then he drew himself up proudly and shot a burning glance of contempt at the men in the room. Hari Singh refused to meet his countryman's eye. It was Conners who put the question to the prince.

"Will you sign a paper?" he asked softly, "stating that you relinquish all claims to the sovereignty of Paruana? If you do, you shall be released immediately."

The Indian smiled coldly. A bitter hatred shone in his eyes.

"I shall not," he said emphatically. "You may kill me if you wish, but I shall do nothing which is not compatible with my honor. I shall not betray my people to this dog."

HE turned his head and glared at Hari Singh. Van, a silent watcher of the proceedings, remained rather puzzled. Even now, though most of the ramifications of the plot were clear to him, he could not understand why Singh wanted the jewels returned to India. Nor, for that matter, why in the contingency of the genuine prince's refusal to sign the abdication papers, he wanted the Rajah also to be taken to Calcutta with the gems.

Hari Singh turned to Conners.

"Very well," he said. "Bring him with the jewels. And by the

way, are you sure that you now have the genuine stones?"

Conners made a gesture to Charters. The latter slowly pulled himself out of his chair and, crossing the room, flung open the top of a huge valise which lay on the window seat; and despite the fact that he had seen them before, Van could not restrain a gasp of admiration at the shimmering beauty which met his gaze.

CHAPTER VII

Bullets Talk

FOR there, glittering in the light of the chandelier, lay the famous jewels of Paruana. Rubies and emeralds of perfect luster, sans flaw; a score of perfectly matched pearls, the size of a hen's egg, and in the center of this glittering group, standing, arrogant and proud was the famous Paruana diamond, a gleaming flawless thing of splendor whose history was writ in the blood of gallant men.

As the Rajah looked at his gems, Van saw his hands clench at his sides. His eyes smoldered with impotent rage as he saw the gems being snatched from his possession, as he witnessed the triumph of his enemies, and stood by helpless to save either himself or his precious stones.

Charter's beady little eyes never left the Indian. His revolver held carelessly in his hand was ready for instantaneous action.

Then of a sudden a strange thing happened.

The man who looked like Louie Senton crossed the room in two long strides. He stood at the side of the jewel-filled valise. He slammed the top down swiftly. Then both his hands dove into his pockets. They appeared again bearing two objects.

The first was an automatic which pointed its evil snub-nose at Conners' heart. The second was a silver police whistle. Ere any man in the room could recover from his astonishment, ere he could divine the meaning of Louie Senton's odd conduct, the silver whistle had shrieked out three shrill, piercing blasts that reverberated through the room.

Conners sprang suddenly to his feet. The amazement in his eyes vanished and was replaced by a murderous threat. His lips moved convulsively.

"Louie!" he shouted. "You double-crossing rat! You'll die for this."

For a single moment a tense silence held the room in its grip. Without, there came the sound of tramping feet.

Heavy hands pounded on the outside door.

Charters, with an alacrity amazing in him, whirled around suddenly. His finger constricted on the trigger of his gun and two staccato reports blared through the room. Van heard the leaden slugs sing over his head.

Before he could return the fire, men poured into the room. Conners shouted to them: "Get the jewels and the Indian away. The police are here. Fast, now."

Two men laid hands on the Indian. He struggled desperately in their grasp. Van pressed the trigger of the automatic. One of the Indian's assailants fell to the floor, blood streaming from his temple. Conners cursed. His hand flashed to his hip.

VAN moved the muzzle of his gun toward the leader of the gang. Even as he did so, he saw Hari Singh with a swift jerk of his wrist slip a knife from the sleeve of his coat into his brown hand. With

the gleaming blade uplifted he advanced upon Van.

Van's foot shot out like a spring. It caught the Indian on the wrist. The knife clattered impotently to the floor. By now half a dozen men were reaching for their weapons. Van knew that even though the pounding on the door outside grew louder, he had little chance of holding off the mob until the police arrived.

He lifted his gun swiftly. A single shot echoed through the room. The steel jacketed bullet from its magazine hurled itself through the air, and struck the center of the chandelier with shattering force. Darkness fell over the room like a sable blanket, bringing with it death and confusion.

IN the darkness, though the staccato sound of revolver fire and the excited shouts of the men resounded, Van stood stock still, one hand tightly holding the valise which contained a ransom in gems, the other steadily gripping his automatic. He dared not move.

He could not even attempt the rescue of the Rajah.

If he left his present position, the jewels might be snatched from his grasp. He heard Conners' voice through the room.

"The cops are in. Get the Indian out. Get the jewels. Take them through the secret passageway."

Van felt someone seize the valise. It jerked and wriggled beneath his grip. A hand reached out and seized his coat. He wrenched free and struck the knuckles sharply with the barrel of his weapon. Then he heard Charters cry out in alarm.

"Here they come. Scram everybody."

There was a scuffle of feet upon the floor. Dim shadowy figures disappeared through the doorway into the hall. More shots reverberated through the building. Then half a dozen streaks of light from an electric torch speared their way through the darkness.

A voice said: "Stick up your hands, Louie."

Van grinned. "Is that you, Rolph?"

Inspector Rolph came closer.

"Yeah," he said. "It's me. What have you got there, Louie?"

"I've got what I came for, Inspector," said Van. "And I'm not Louie Senton."

A flashlight threw its white beam directly in his face.

"The hell you're not," said Rolph.

Van laid his gun on the table. He thrust his hand in his coat pocket, then withdrawing it, held it out to the policeman, palm upward. Rolph's flashlight turned downward. The beam showed that Van's extended hand held a small platinum badge, superimposed in its center was a gold mask.

Rolph gasped in astonishment as he stared down at the symbol which made the Phantom's identity known to the police of the world.

"God," he said. "It's you. Are those the jewels?" He indicated the valise.

Van nodded. "Yes," he said. "Get one of your men to take charge of them. They've still got the Rajah. We'll go after them."

HASTILY Rolph assigned a plain-clothes man to take care of the valise, then with Van he raced out into the passageway. Down the hall they ran, finally to emerge into a large lighted room. A score of policemen dominated the room, and standing around the walls with their arms uplifted were a dozen of Conners' men.

Van hastily scanned the faces of the captives.

"Conners isn't here," he said. "In fact, none of the big shots are. We'd better search the house."

Acting on that suggestion Rolph detailed his men to various parts of the house. Then he and Van climbed the stairs to investigate the upper story personally.

As they gained the top landing, Rolph seized his arm and cried excitedly: "There he goes!"

Van's eyes followed the direction indicated by the policeman's pointing finger to see Conners hastily fling himself through a doorway into one of the rooms off the hallway.

The pair of them raced swiftly down the hall. Rolph flung himself up against the door. It swung open, and the two of them were catapulted into the room.

Conners stood unarmed near the window. Before him was a hard-faced little man with a vicious expression in his eyes. He held a gun in his hand, and that gun was pointed at Conners' head. Then before either Van or the inspector could make a move to prevent the murder, the little man pressed the trigger of his weapon.

A DEAFENING report echoed through the room. Conners uttered a terrible scream of fear. His right hand instinctively clapped itself to his forehead. The little man cast a single glance at the two who had just entered, then without hesitation flung himself at the window.

Glass shattered about him as his body struck the pane. Then he disappeared into the darkness of the night. On the floor by the smashed glass lay Conners, an ugly hole in the center of his forehead. Still and inert he lay, blood deluging the carpet beneath him.

Van had no time to examine the body, no time to attempt to explain why one of the crook's own men should kill him. He turned to Rolph.

"Go downstairs to the rear. Head him off. I'll go through the window."

ROLPH nodded, and without taking time to reply, turned and fled like a madman down the stairs. Van climbed through the jagged hole in the window to the fire-escape beyond.

He ran swiftly down the metal steps to the yard beneath in time to see the little man clambering over a fence. At that moment, Rolph appeared through the back door, gun in hand.

"Did we miss him?" he asked.

For answer Van pointed to the dark figure which at that moment was disappearing over the board fence.

"Stop," cried Rolph, "or we'll fire."

A savage report from the fugitive's revolver was his only reply. And the little gangster dropped from sight behind the fence. Van raced across the yard. Lightly he vaulted the fence. A shot whistled over his head as he gained the other yard.

Desperately, like a cornered rat, the little gangster cowered up against the brick wall of a towering apartment house. His revolver was clutched in a tense white hand. Its muzzle pointed at Van's heart. Behind him Rolph, panting and cursing his excess weight, clambered over the fence.

"Don't come a step nearer," snarled the little man, "or I'll kill you."

Van eyed him calmly.

"You're nabbed," he said quietly. "Dead to rights. Drop that gun. I'm a crack shot—and if you try

any funny business I'll shoot first."

The little man cackled.

"You double-crossing rat Louie Senton," he said. "You're the lousiest shot in the mob, and you know it. You can't bluff me. Here it comes, rat."

His finger constricted on the trigger, but even before the catch could release the striker, the weapon in the hand of the man he had designated as the lousiest shot in the mob, spoke once. Straight and true the bullet sped through the air. Then it struck the steel of the little gangster's gun, knocking it from his hand.

THE man emitted a scream of pain as the weapon was wrenched from his hand. In another instant Rolph was at his side.

"We better go back to the house," said Van. "We can see if your men have found anything else. Besides, I'm rather interested in searching the body of Conners. We might find something of interest."

With the captured murderer between them they made their way to the street through the apartment house and walked around the block to Conners' headquarters. The little gangster suddenly looked up. An odd grin twisted his lips.

"What am I being arrested for, Inspector?" he asked.

Rolph grunted.

"Murder," he said. "You killed Conners, didn't you?"

The little man's grin persisted.

"Isn't there some law about having to produce the dead man's body before you can pin a murder rap on a guy?"

"Corpus delicti," said Rolph. "Why do you want to know?"

The other made no answer, but it seemed to Van as they entered the house again that his grin had grown broader.

Upon questioning his men, it was learned by Van and Rolph that neither Charters, Winton nor the Rajah had been found. Rolph turned a worried face to Van.

"We've got the jewels," he said. "But they've got the Rajah. It's a stalemate."

"Conners said something about a secret passage," said Van. "I'll go upstairs and go through his clothes. There may be some clue to it there."

Rolph nodded, and Van sped up the stairway to the room in which he had seen Conners shot. He pulled the door open and entered the room. Then on the threshold he stopped dead, astonishment and apprehension clutching at his heart.

For the room was empty!

CHAPTER VIII

The Missing Corpse

THE corpse of Conners which had lain by the window, with its life's blood draining from the ugly wound in his temple, had vanished completely. Recovering from his surprise, Van hastily crossed the room.

On the rug at his feet was a deep crimson stain, but no sign of Conners, no clue was visible. Van retraced his steps to the hall. There, standing at the head of the stairs, was a policeman.

"How long have you been here?" Van asked.

"The Inspector posted me here when he left that room a few minutes ago," said the man.

Van nodded abstractedly, and a frown corrugated his brow. If the man had been at this post for that length of time, it was impossible that one of Conners' minions could have carried their leader from the room unobserved.

It was equally impossible that the corpse could have been smuggled

through the window, for no one had come down into the yard behind Van. He walked slowly back down the stairs where Rolph had gathered his prisoners.

"Well," the inspector greeted him, "what now?"

"Take all these men to Headquarters," said Van. "Deposit the jewels in a vault at the Second National until further orders. We must hold them until we find the Rajah."

The little man who had fired the shot at Conners looked up with a sneer at the man he still believed was the traitorous Louie Senton.

"So," he said, "and what are you going to do with me? Did you find Conners' body?"

SOMETHING clicked in Van's mind as he looked at him. The hard-faced gangster seemed positive that the body of Conners was not going to be found where they had left it. In fact, as Van recalled his words immediately after his capture, he had seemed sure of it *then.* Perhaps in this rat of the underworld he could find the clue to the disappearance of Conners' corpse.

"Take him away," he said to Rolph. "And have him ready for questioning tomorrow. There are a few things I'd like to ask this gentleman."

Rolph herded his prisoners together and loaded them in the patrol wagons pulled up at the curb. Van left the house, hailed a taxi, and a few moments later entered his own apartment on Park Avenue, a sorely puzzled and extremely disappointed young man.

For when he had set out that evening he had been optimistic and hopeful of completing his task at once. Disguised as Senton and with the address of Conners' headquarters in his pocket, he had ventured there to discover as much as

Curved knives flashing, they charged.

he could before he blew the signal which brought the police in.

He had firmly believed that he could round up the whole gang and end the episode of the jewel robbery. But once again it seemed Conners had beaten him.

He sat long and late in his favorite chair. The room was filled with hazy smoke from his cigar. His brow was corrugated with a dark frown.

With his own eyes he had seen Conners slain. With his own eyes he had seen the death shot fired. He had seen the ugly gaping wound in the man's head. Yet the corpse had disappeared in less than five minutes' time. Too, the man who had done the killing seemed little concerned about his capture. He appeared to know more than he was willing to tell.

True, the net he had woven had closed about some of the gang. But unfortunately the big fish had swum easily through its meshes. The Rajah was gone. Hari Singh had not been captured. Charters and Winton had disappeared as completely as had the bloody corpse of Conners himself.

No, the answer to this problem was not as easy as Dick Van Loan had thought it was going to be. Apparently there was more to the affair than met the eye. It had started merely a jewel robbery. True, a robbery of gigantic proportions, but nevertheless a case of simple larceny.

BUT now it appeared as if the international complications, the intrigue of Oriental politics was the moving spirit behind the whole thing. It was obvious enough that Hari Singh was the representative of the Indian group who for their own reasons wanted the real Rajah out of the way. But why the gems were being returned to Calcutta, why the Prince of Paruana was being returned to his own country, were the obtuse pieces which Van could not quite fit into the jig-saw of the mystery.

However, Van knew that Conners, dead or alive as he might be, had by no means won the day. He, and his scheming allies were helpless without the gems. The Rajah's power could not be broken while he possessed that wealth. Of course, with the prince in their power they could slay him, but for some obscure reason they seemed reluctant to do that. It seemed essential to their plans that inasmuch as he had refused to sign the paper of abdication, he must return to India.

Dawn thrust her gray fingers through the night and the red rim of the sun appeared over the eastern horizon, when at last the man who the world knew as the Phantom put the problem temporarily aside and went to bed, no nearer a solution of the problem than he had been when he had begun.

CHAPTER IX

Sinister Message

FRANK HAVENS, publisher of the *Clarion* and a string of newspapers throughout the country, sat at his desk, a worried frown upon his brow. In his hand was a piece of paper with a typewritten message upon it.

Since he had received the missive in the noon mail he had read and reread it a score of times, though as a matter of fact it was not addressed to him. The inscription on the envelope had consisted of merely two words. The letter had been consigned to *The Phantom.*

Now, Frank Havens was the single man in the world who knew the identity of the masked scourge who

pitted his might against crime. This fact was generally known, and this was not the first time that he had received messages intended for Van Loan.

Already Havens had heard the story of last night's affair from Inspector Rolph. Already he had heard how Conners had been shot through the head by one of his own men, and had then disappeared. And this last fact coupled with the signature of the letter he held in his hand accounted for more than fifty per cent of the puzzled frown that he was wearing.

There were two doors to the office in which Havens sat. The entrance which faced his desk was used by anyone having business with him. It was a big door with a large frosted glass panel in it. Behind him was a smaller portal, narrow and inconspicuous, looking rather as if it led into a closet than anything else.

That door was used by but one man. It was the secret entrance used by the Phantom when he desired to enter the publisher's office unobserved. And now as Havens still stared at the typewritten message in his hand the door behind him slowly opened.

The publisher started as he heard it close, then he turned around in his swivel chair and gazed into the clean-cut features of Dick Van Loan.

VAN waved him a greeting, then sat down on the other side of the desk.

"Well," he said lightly, "here I am in response to your frantic phone call. What's the matter?"

By way of reply Havens handed the letter to him. Van took it and read slowly:

To The Phantom:

It would have been better for you had you taken the Rajah instead of the jewels. He would have been more difficult for me to recover. As you have already noticed safes are easy for me to open. So easy that I'm telling you now that at precisely midnight, I shall take the jewels back from the vaults of the Second National Bank. I hope you will guard them in person, as I have a little score to settle with you. I'll meet you tonight at the bank—if you have the guts.

Conners.

P. S.—Sometimes it's better to make sure of the corpse before you go after the killer.

VAN raised his eyebrows and tossed the note on the desk. He stared quizzically at Havens. The publisher regarded him anxiously.

"What do you think?" he asked apprehensively.

Van grinned. "I think our friend Conners has a sense of humor," he replied.

"Be serious," said Havens.

"I *am* serious," said Van. "A crook with a sense of humor is dangerous. It took a sense of humor to stage that phoney killing last night. I still don't know how he did it, but he did. Conners is brainy—and dangerous. If you ask me what I make of this note, I must answer frankly that I don't know."

"But," persisted Havens, "if he really plans to take the gems from the bank, why does he warn us?"

Van considered this for a silent moment.

"Well," he said at last, "there are three possible reasons for it. First, sheer bravado. Second, he's so damned sure that whatever he's got planned will work that he doesn't care if we try to stop him. Third, it may be a trap to send me to the

Second National tonight in order that Mr. Conners may plant a bullet in my heart."

"That's how I figured it," said Havens. "It's a trap. That's all. Well, all you have to do is keep away from the Second National tonight."

"On the contrary," said Dick Van Loan with a smile, "that's one place that you couldn't keep me away from. Conners slipped out of my hands last night, and I'm overlooking no bets that will put me back on his trail."

"You're a fool," said Havens sharply, but in his eyes there was an expression of deep concern for his friend.

Van rose to his feet.

"Sure, I'm a fool," he said, and there was a vague wistfulness in his tone. "Any man who doesn't get married and live peacefully in the suburbs is a fool. But once upon a time I threw all that overboard for the privilege of chasing crooks and dodging bullets. It's too late to change now."

Then before the elder man could answer, he had slipped quickly through the narrow door and was gone.

CHAPTER X

The Unseen Hand

THE big clock in the marble rotunda of the Second National Bank ticked away the minutes. The hands indicated that the time was a little after eleven thirty. Despite the lateness of the hour, every light in the bank was turned on. The Carrara of the walls gleamed like sunlit snow beneath the rays of the incandescent bulbs.

Before a tremendous steel gate which led to the vaults stood five men. One of them wore a black silk mask which covered the upper half of his face. One wore the gray uniform of a watchman. Two of the others were a pair of the most resourceful and brilliant plain-clothesmen that police headquarters could provide. The fifth man, clad in immaculate evening clothes, was George R. Champion, international financier, and president of the Second National. Against the Phantom's wishes he had insisted on keeping the vigil with the others.

A tense silence pervaded the cathedral-like atmosphere of the bank. True, Champion was inclined to be sceptical of the threat to loot his vaults. He had already pointed out to Van the impregnability of the iron and steel which held the Rajah's jewels.

FIRST, the steel grilled gate was equipped with a time lock. Back of that was a huge vault. It held twelve steel locks, and its double doors had a total thickness of three feet. Behind that veritable fortress of metal were the gems of Paruana.

On the face of things, it was inconceivable that the barriers which guarded the immense treasure could be shattered. Even the attitude of the policemen who had long since learned to expect anything, was one of deferential doubt.

Of all the men in that room, Van was the only person who did not underrate the plans of Conners. He realized that judged by any ordinary standard, it would be impossible to consummate the robbery at midnight. But already he had seen two safes whose doors were ripped from their hinges by some subtle device unknown to him.

Of course, neither of those had been the stalwart, massive strong boxes that this vault was, but, nevertheless, Van stood tense and silent, his right hand resting on the re-

volver butt in his pocket, prepared to come to grips with whatever the redoubtable Conners might bring forth.

THE clock ticked on. The minute hand slowly climbed upward towards its zenith. Now it was less than two inches away from the hour. Instinctively the men became more tense as their eyes watched the face of the timepiece, as the hour at which Conners had threatened to strike drew nearer and nearer.

Then suddenly Champion spoke nervously.

"It's hot in here," he said. "Close." He turned to the watchman. "Open a window, will you?"

Van glanced at the financier. His brow was wet with perspiration. Despite his scoffing of earlier in the evening, he appeared nervous now that the time for the scheduled robbery drew near. It was apparent that he had given the order to the watchman more for the sake of speaking, of relieving his nerves, rather than out of a desire for air.

The watchman opened a window, then returned to his post near the others before the steel door. Again the ticking of the clock alone broke the silence. It seemed as if the mechanism of the timepiece hammered out an ominous message—a message of danger and death. One of the plainclothesmen shifted uneasily. His fingers sought the protruding handle of his forty-five in his belt.

Something inside the clock whirred as the mechanism prepared to strike the hour. A silvery chime ripped into the pregnant silence like a shot. The five men stood alert, keyed up to abnormal pitch before the steel door.

Then before their very eyes a miracle happened. A miracle of black magic—a miracle spawned by the powers of darkness—a miracle which defied all the laws of science, which by its very impossibility struck terror into the hearts of those five waiting men.

The steel door moved!

No hand had touched it. No one had entered the bank. Every physical thing was precisely as it had been ten seconds before. And yet the steel door moved!

It moved outward ever so slightly; moved against the eight steel locks that held it in place. The locks were pressed hard up against the slots that held them. It was as if some invisible giant was pushing the door from within, pushing against that steel, trying desperately with a superhuman strength to break it.

THERE was a sudden sharp crack. Solid steel snapped in twain, clean and swift. Eight stalwart metal locks snapped off as if they were made of papier mache. The steel door swung open. It jerked crazily on its hinges. Its locks protruded jaggedly from its side, splintered, snapped off like rotten wood.

And now the last chime of the clock tolling the hour reverberated off into space, leaving behind it a deafening silence — the appalling silence engendered of a terrible intangible fear.

Van's heart thudded against his breast. It was a long time since terror had touched him with its icy awful hand. Death he did not fear. Man he did not fear. But this—this intangible black magic happening before his eyes flooded him with a despairing sense of his own complete impotence.

What could he do? There was no foe to fight. The weapon which he held in his hand was useless. There was on one to use it against. There

was nothing! For a moment he doubted his own sanity. Thought perhaps that he was the victim of a weird illusion. But a glance at the terror stamped countenances of his allies convinced him that this impossible thing was really happening.

Champion's face was deathly pale. The watchman cringed up against the steel grating and muttered softly: "God!" And it was not an oath. It was a prayer.

The two detectives stared at each other. Their guns were in their hands. Their eyes were wide, distended. Their lips were white.

The five of them stared in fearful fascination at the huge door of the safe which held the jewels of Paruana. It was performing the same incredible feat as had the steel door of the vaults. The metal strained against the locks. In the center of the door the steel buckled and bulged.

THEN again came the staccato sound of snapped metal, and the door swung wide open. The inner door ripped its locks a second later, and there, gleaming arrogantly in the brilliant light of the chandelier were the jewels of Paruana.

But now — now that the jewels were exposed, Van sprang to action. Perhaps miracles could open safe doors, but he still doubted that they could lift up gems and transport them through space. No, if the jewels were to be stolen, this was the time that a human agency would enter into the affair.

Swiftly he took up his position before the open door of the safe. His revolver was held steadily in his hand.

"Stand here with me," he said to the others. "Shoulder to shoulder. And if you see or feel anything, blaze away."

The four of them did as he ordered. Five men stood, shoulders touching. Five revolvers were held out before them. Five nervous fingers touched hair triggers. Five men waited, tense and silent for an invisible enemy to mow them down.

Then, with the abruptness of a tropical sunset, the lights went out. The bank was plunged into complete darkness. And still no human element had showed itself. No living being had entered the building.

VAN'S hand grew tighter on the butt of his gun.

"Stand steady," he said to the others in an even voice. "Keep touching shoulders. Fire at the first suspicious movement, at the first sound."

The five of them stood there in the pitch darkness. The clock ticked monotonously. In the sable blanket that surrounded them Van could hear the irregular breathing of the others. His eyes strained through the darkness, yet he saw nothing.

His ears were keyed up to abnormal pitch, yet he heard nothing save the beating of his own heart. And then—with a suddenness which almost dislocated his wrist, his gun was jerked from his hand.

Yet he could have sworn that no human hand had touched the weapon. He heard it clatter on the marble floor. He heard cries of alarm from the others. He heard the rattle of their weapons on the stone as they, too, were disarmed.

Then something biting, acrid, pungent, bit into his nostrils; and with a bitter sense of failure in his heart he knew that they had been defeated.

"Quick," he cried. "It's gas. We must get out of here."

Blindly through the terrible darkness the five men, panic stricken, raced across the smooth floor of the

bank. Van dared not use the flashlight in his pocket. Now for the first time he found the darkness friendly. It covered their retreat, perhaps saved them from a savage death.

Now he knew that there was someone else in the room. He heard a low chuckle behind him. The gas grew more dense now as he groped his way across the dark room. Suddenly he heard one of the detectives cry out:

"Here! Over this way. I've found an open door."

A RAY of light filtered into the room as the plainclothesman opened the exit he had stumbled upon. Van raced toward the shaft of light and as he did so a hail of bullets came from the bank's interior and whizzed over his head. He hurled himself through the doorway, closely followed by the watchman and the second detective.

The three of them raced down the hallway to the executive offices of the bank. Van entered the first door he saw.

"Call headquarters," he said. "Fast. Get the riot squad out. And for God's sake, hurry."

One of the detectives put through the call. The watchman, panting and trembling, said: "Where's Mr. Champion?"

Van glanced up quickly. In the excitement of the escape from that nauseating poisonous gas, he had failed to notice that the financier was missing.

"He's still downstairs," he said. Then his jaws set grimly and the old fighting light came into his eyes. No matter what nefarious black magic Conners had mastered, he could not leave a human being down there to die helplessly, breathing that noxious poison. He started toward the door.

The detective, having completed the call to headquarters, looked up and said: "Where are you going?"

"To get Champion," said Van grimly.

The detective looked at him sharply.

"You're a fool," he said. "They'll kill you."

Van made no answer, but resolutely stepped out into the hall, reflecting rather grimly that this was the second time he had been called a fool in twelve hours. And after the manner in which Conners had made good his threat to recover the jewels, Richard Curtis Van Loan was beginning to think that, perhaps, after all, the epithet was most fitting.

CHAPTER XI

Fiendish Power!

CAUTIOUSLY he opened the door leading to the main section of the bank. The gas bit into his nostrils as he did so, but now it seemed fainter than before. He was unarmed and not unaware of the desperate risk he was running. Yet he could not desert Champion, leave him there at the mercy of the Conners' gang.

His eyes strained into the darkness of the room. He could see nothing. He could hear no movement. Silently he stepped through the door into the room. Holding his breath he remained motionless for a moment. Then as suddenly as they had gone out, the lights flashed on again.

Van blinked his eyes to accustom himself to the brilliant glare of the lights. Swiftly he looked about him, ready to close hand to hand with the enemy. But he was the only living person in the room.

Swirling on the floor were little gray clouds of gas, which, being

heavier than air, had responded to the force of gravity. Gas floated crazily about his legs as he cautiously approached the swinging door of the safe.

He stopped in front of the big metal chamber and peered inside. As he had expected, it was empty. The jewels of Paruana were gone. Conners had made good his threat. Lying on the floor at his feet were five revolvers exactly where they had dropped when the invisible hand had jerked them from the defenders' hands.

VAN stared dully into the vacuous depths of the empty safe, and a sensation of utter defeat came over him. The sound of a door closing gently behind him and a footstep jerked him out of his reverie.

He whirled around on his heel, ready for battle, but to his relief he saw Champion enter the room from a small door at the rear.

"Thank God, you're safe," he said. "Where did you go?"

Champion seemed to hesitate for a moment, then indicated the door through which he had come with his thumb.

"I got out through there," he said. "It leads to the basement. I examined the fuse box. The fuse was burned out. I just put in another one."

He stared beyond Van at the yawning safe.

"They're gone, eh?"

Van nodded.

"Yes," he said gravely. "They're gone, and so are the persons who took them. God, Champion, I've been in some tight places in my time. But I never saw anything like this. Those steel doors flew open as if the devil himself was pulling at them. Then the way those guns were jerked from our hands has me completely baffled."

The financier shook his head solemnly.

"Please God," he said, reverently, "I never witness a thing like that again. It was awful, terrible."

HE shuddered, and as Dick Van Loan thought of the things he had witnessed that night, he knew that he had faced a thing that was infinitely worse than death—a terrible evil thing, that was beyond the mind of normal man.

If Conners had the power to do such things as these, there was no limit to the depredations he could commit. If he had perfected some fiendish machine of science to do these things for him he could hold the entire world at bay.

There floated through the window the clanging of a bell. Brakes grated. Feet pounded up the bank's steps, and a moment later a detail of police, captained by Rolph, burst into the room. The latter took a single look at the empty safe, and gasped.

"The jewels! They're gone! How—how could it happen under your eyes? How—"

He stared in utter bewilderment at the masked man who had never before failed. His utterly prosaic mind failed to comprehend how the precious stones could be taken from the safe under the watchful eyes of the Phantom.

"Yes, how?" repeated Van grimly. "If I told you, Rolph, you wouldn't believe me. You'd say that I was mad. However, there's nothing to be done here."

"Good God!" said Rolph. "If the jewels have been snatched from under your very nose, I'd say that there was nothing to be done at all."

"Yes, there is," said Van resolutely. "There's one man who perhaps can tell us something."

"Who?"

"That little rat who took the pot shot at Conners last night. I want to see him at once."

"Well," said Rolph glumly, "you'll never get one of Conners' men to talk. They're too much afraid of what the hell you're holding me for."

Van ignored this remark.

"Rossi," he said, "I've come here for some information. I'll see that things go easy with you if you'll talk."

The Phantom swung his revolver at his assailant with all his strength.

what he'll do to them. But if you want to see him, come along, I'll take you there."

His name on the police blotter was Rossi, and his record was by no means as brief as his cognomen. Van stood masked in the man's cell, staring at him. Rossi, seated on his bunk, a sneer on his face, glared back.

"Well," he said. "I'd like to know

The little Italian laughed mockingly.

"There's others — bigger shots than you, who'll see that things are mighty tough for me if I *do* talk," he replied.

"Listen, Rossi," said Van. "You're in a tough spot and you don't seem to realize it."

"The hell I am!" said Rossi. "You can't pin nothing on me."

"No?" said Van. "How about a murder rap?"

The gangster laughed again.

"Don't be funny," he said contemptuously. "What murder are you talking about?"

"You forget that two competent witnesses saw you shoot Conners."

The gangster remained unmoved.

"You can't bluff me," he said. "You haven't even found Conners' body. You can't even prove he's dead. And I'm not talking."

"Then," said Van grimly, "perhaps I can find a way to make you."

"Perhaps," said Rossi, unconvinced. "You find Conners' corpse and then come back and tell me about that murder rap."

"Maybe," said Van grimly, as he stepped toward the door of the cell. "Maybe I will find that corpse, Rossi."

HE clanged the door shut and locked it. As he walked down the cell block he heard the Italian's mocking laughter follow him.

He went at once to Rolph's office and finding the Inspector had stepped out for a moment, proceeded to make himself at home. He threw himself in an upholstered leather chair by the desk, and lost himself in meditation.

For the moment he was checkmated, completely and utterly, by Conners. The matter was fast getting out of hand. He recalled the conversation Conners had had with Hari Singh about removing the jewels and the Rajah to Calcutta. Well, it seemed as if there was nothing to prevent them doing it now.

He sighed wearily and taxed his fertile imagination to its utmost. Already he knew the police had given the alarm. Every departing vessel would be closely watched. The Coast Guard, too, had its orders. But even so, the wits of Conners might well prove equal to the task of smuggling his loot from the country.

Rossi, the sullen little gangster who sat in his cell, supremely confident that the authorities could do nothing with him, was the only remaining link which could lead him back to the trail.

The immediate problem was to make him talk. Van realized full well that third degree methods were of no avail. Rossi, like all his ilk, feared the wrath of the Underworld far, far more than he feared a beating from the police.

Force would not do. Strategy was called for most emphatically.

Then of a sudden an idea struck him. He sat bolt upright in his chair. A smile crossed his face. He picked up the phone on the Inspector's desk and put through a call to the Morgue. He had just completed his conversation when Rolph entered the office.

"Well," he greeted Van. "Have you learned anything?"

Van sprang to his feet.

"Not yet," he said. "But I think something's going to break in a minute. Listen, will you bring Rossi personally down to the Morgue in twenty minutes?"

Rolph raised his eyebrows.

"The Morgue?" he echoed in astonishment.

Van was already at the door.

"Yeah," he said. "The Morgue. I want to teach him that there's still a thing or two that he hasn't learned about *corpus delicti*."

CHAPTER XII

At the Morgue

ABOUT half an hour later the still puzzled Rolph entered the eerie chamber of the Morgue. An insipid electric light overhead shed a ghastly illumina-

tion over the long coffin shaped room whose sides were lined with plain marble slabs. Some of them were empty. Some were not. Rossi, no less puzzled than his escort, glanced up at the Inspector.

"What's the idea?" he asked, and Rolph, not knowing, made no reply. A masked figure stepped out of the shadows and came toward them. Rolph looked at him inquiringly, but said nothing. More than once he had seen what appeared like a weird scheme of the Phantom's evolve into something tangible, something that brought results.

Van approached the gangster.

"Listen, Rossi," he said without preamble. "A short while ago I offered you a break if you'd talk. I'm giving you your last chance."

"You're crazy," said the Italian, defiantly. "You ain't got nothing on me."

"Two of us saw you shoot Conners," said Van. "You can burn for that."

"If you find the body I can burn for it," said Rossi. "But you can't."

"The hell I can't," said Richard Curtis Van Loan. "Look!"

He thrust the gangster toward a marble slab which lay in a dim corner of the room. Rolph followed his charge. Then the pair of them stared wide-eyed at the sight they saw.

FOR there, lying on the cold stone, was Conners! Conners with a gaping red wound in the center of his forehead, his body draped in a swaddling sheet. His eyes were dull and glassy as they stared cold and unseeing at the ceiling.

Rossi's confidence of a moment ago fled like the winter snows. He turned a terrified face to the masked man.

"I didn't do it," he jibbered. "I didn't do it. I—"

"We saw you do it," said Van grimly. "The Inspector and myself saw you with our own eyes. There's your *corpus delicti*, Rossi. What have you got to say to that?"

THE little gangster was beside himself with fright. Again he stared at the body on the slab as if his very eyes were deceiving him. But his second examination showed him that the stiff and cold corpse was undoubtedly that of Conners.

"Honest to God, I didn't do it," he screamed. "The rod I shot at Conners with was loaded with blanks. I—"

Van's heart picked up a beat.

"You'd better talk now, Rossi," he said. "It's your only hope."

Rossi seized him by the arm.

"I'll talk," he said. "I'll tell all I know. But you got to believe me. I didn't knock off Conners."

Van signalled to Rolph, and the three of them adjourned to the night watchman's office at the rear of the death chamber. Van sat the gangster between himself and the amazed Rolph.

"Don't forget, Rossi," he said. "You'll burn if you don't answer all my questions truthfully. You haven't got a chance. There's Conners' body in there. Dead as a doornail. Rolph and I saw you commit the crime. Now what have you got to say. Go ahead. Talk."

Rossi gulped nervously. His face was ashen white. His fingers twined about each other as he spoke.

"It was all a frame," he said. "It was Conners' idea. We had it framed that when things got too hot, when he was in a tight spot, I was to jerk out my rod and let fly at him with a blank. He slapped his hand to his forehead as he fell. When he did that he stuck a flesh colored piece of rubber in his head. The blood was dye."

Van nodded and a gleam of satisfaction came into his keen eyes. Rossi continued in tremulous tones.

"I couldn't have killed him. Someone else must have knocked him off. He wasn't dead the other night. It was part of the frame that you mugs would chase me, leaving Conners lying there on the floor. That gave him his chance to make a getaway. See?"

"I see," said Van gravely. "But I doubt if a jury will."

Rossi leaned forward in his chair, a piteous appeal was in his eyes.

"But it's true," he said desperately. "I *didn't* kill him. Oh, my God, I—"

"Take it easy," said Van. "If you can answer some other questions I'm going to ask, I might be able to fix things, Rossi."

BY this time all Rossi's mocking defiance had left him. In its place was abject appeal, desperate despair.

"Anything," he said. "I'll answer anything. But for God's sake get me out of this mess. I—"

"All right," interrupted Van. "Tell me this. How did Conners plan to get the jewels and the kidnaped Rajah out of this country? Didn't he realize that the police are watching every boat?"

Rossi hesitated for a moment. Then as if he realized that the only fear he need now have for the dead Conners was the fear of roasting in the chair for his murder, he came clean.

"Yeah," he replied. "He figured that. That's why he chartered the submarine."

"The what?"

"The submarine," said Rossi. "He figured that was the only way he could get the gang and the stuff out of the country without being nabbed."

Now for the first time since the interview had begun, Rolph spoke. Things were happening entirely too fast for his routine mind. He uttered two amazed words. "Good heavens!"

BUT Van took no notice of him. In fact, it seemed that even his interest in Rossi had suddenly waned. He rose to his feet and asked one more question.

"Now tell me, Rossi. If Conners had lived, when did he plan to leave in the submarine?"

Rossi wrinkled his brow.

"Tonight's the fifth, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then it's at dawn he figured on sailing. Six o'clock on the sixth. But I guess it's all over now that he got bumped off. But I swear to God I didn't do it."

Van ignored his desperate disavowal of murder.

"Where is this submarine?" he asked.

"Dock 16. Brooklyn."

Van glanced at his wrist watch, then turned excitedly to Rolph.

"We've got to work fast now. There's no time to lose. I'll start out right away for Dock 16. Get a wagon over there as fast as you can. We've just got time to stop it."

Rolph blinked.

"Stop what?"

"Conners and his load of loot that is sailing for India at dawn. Get going, man."

Both Rolph and Rossi stared at him.

"But Conners is dead," they said together.

In the doorway Van suddenly recalled that he had not yet let the Inspector in on his ingenious device to open Rossi's mouth. Breathlessly he explained from the threshold.

"Conners isn't dead," he said. "The chap you saw on that slab is a

morgue attendant. I made him up to look like Conners to put the fear of God into Rossi, to make him talk. Now hurry. Get a wagon over there at once."

Rolph gasped as he realized the trick that had been perpetrated on Rossi. The little gangster's face turned suddenly purple. The desperate appeal in his eyes evolved to savage Sicilian wrath. His tongue bit off oaths like machine-gun missiles. But Van Loan had no time to stop and listen. He slammed the door and raced down the hall, intent on reaching the vessel that Conners was about to make his escape in.

A taxi whirled him through the streets. He buried his masked face in the collar of his overcoat and sank down low in the seat in order to avoid being observed.

The cab tore through the deserted streets of the early morning. Through the business section, over the bridge to the Borough of Churches. Near the Brooklyn waterfront the driver accepted a huge tip with a grin and deposited his passenger.

IT WAS still dark when Van cautiously made his way into the big shed that covered the pier. Outside he could hear the faint lapping of the water against the piles. Silently he stole along the shadowy wall.

Then by straining his eyes through the darkness, he made out, at the end of the dock, the faint silhouette of the conning tower of a submarine.

Voices floated to his ears. He melted into the shadows and listened.

From the staccato commands he heard from the submarine, he realized that they were about to cast off. Men ran down from the conning tower, picked up bulky bundles from the dock and bore them aboard. Apparently these were the last minute stores being loaded for the long under-sea trip.

Van waited silently. It was foolhardy to make a move single-handed when he knew it was merely a matter of moments until the police rode up. If the vessel showed signs of sailing ere the men of Rolph arrived, however, his hand would be forced. He would be compelled to make a move on his own initiative.

HE glanced down at the luminous dial of his watch and reflected that it was strange that the wagon had not yet arrived. Undoubtedly Rolph would put the order through the precinct nearest to this dock, which would easily have enabled the police to have arrived here before he had himself.

Yet there was no sign of the forces of the law. No familiar clanging of the patrol wagon's bell smote his ears.

He stirred uneasily in the darkness. Once his hand touched the reassuring butt of a .38 in his pocket. Then of a sudden he heard a voice shout from the submarine.

"Make it fast, Knowles. Put in a call to Hari Singh. Tell him we're off. Hurry it up. We're sailing the minute you get back."

Van realized that the time had come for action. If the submarine was to shove off now, he must somehow get aboard. Inexplicably Rolph had failed him. Well, now, as usual with him, he would have to fight alone.

A man clambered down the companionway from the conning tower to the dock. He walked rapidly along the wooden pier. All was dark, and, save for the sound of the man's own footsteps, all was silent, ominously silent.

The man called Knowles skirted a pile of cargo that lay on the dock, and in so doing moved close to the

wall. Then of a sudden he stopped dead and peered into the darkness, vaguely aware that something invisible had moved there.

Then something hard and cold thrust itself up against his breast. A grim voice said: "Put up your hands. Don't move or you will be a dead man."

KNOWLES did not obey the order. Instead, he seized the muzzle of the .38 at his heart and wrenched it aside, in a foolhardy gesture. Foolhardy, because Van could easily have shot him down as he did it.

Two reasons prevented that, however. First, his own revulsion to wanton killing and second the fact that he dared not make a noise which would alarm the others on the submarine.

His left fist shot out in a short hook. It took Knowles flush on the point of the jaw and the man dropped. Hastily Van bent over him and dragged him behind the pile of cargo. Then from his pocket he took a flashlight and turned its yellow beam on the prostrate figure before him.

He breathed a sigh of grateful relief as he saw that the man he had knocked out was approximately of the same size and build as himself. He was pressed for time, and what he intended to do could not be done as thoroughly as he could desire. The similarity of their physical characteristics, however, would lighten his task.

With swift but sure fingers, he stripped the unconscious man's garments from him and hastily donned them. Then taking a water-proof package from his pocket, he withdrew his portable and elaborate makeup outfit which he was never without.

With the aid of a pocket mirror and his flashlight, he deftly touched the grease-paint to his face. Small bits of wax distended his nostrils. Crepe hair and spirit gum made his brows more hirsute. And at the end of ten minutes' labor the face which had been masked until a few moments ago evolved into the face of Knowles.

Finding a piece of line on the dock, Van bound and gagged Knowles. Then, thrusting his make up kit and his flashlight into his pockets, he turned and headed deliberately toward the submarine.

As he reached the end of the dock he turned his head in a final desperate look to see if Rolph's men had yet arrived. Darkness and silence were all that greeted his gaze.

He squared his shoulders. His hands reached out and grasped the sides of the ladder which led to the conning tower. Then with a deep breath he started a climb which might well end in death.

CHAPTER XIII

One Against Four

AS HE lowered himself into the tower, he saw the familiar face of Conners standing at the side of a man in a blue uniform. The gang leader scowled at him.

"You've been a hell of a long time," he said.

"Had trouble getting Singh," said Van. "The wire was busy."

"What did he say?"

"Wished us luck. Said he'd be waiting for us."

His heart was in his throat as he made this stab in the dark. He had no idea what the arrangements with the renegade Indian were, but it seemed logical that he would be in Calcutta when the slow traveling submarine arrived.

The man in the uniform turned to Conners.

"All set?"

Conners nodded. "Shoot, skipper," he said. "And may it be a successful voyage."

The skipper picked up a speaking tube.

"Cast off," he said. "Close the tower."

Two men swarmed up the companion way to make loose the lines which held the vessel to the dock. Van stood there watching the proceedings with a beating heart. Once that conning tower shut he would be imprisoned here with Conners for a long, long while.

For a moment he contemplated drawing his gun and attempting to capture the whole gang single handed. But a moment's thought served to show him the foolhardiness of that gesture.

He was greatly outnumbered. They could easily overpower him, and then with the Phantom out of the way there was no living man to stand between Conners and the realization of his nefarious plans.

THEN, just as the pair of sailors re-entered the tower and were about to batten the hatch, an excited voice hailed them from the dock.

"Hold it," said Conners to the captain. "What's that?"

There came the sound of running feet.

The voice cried out again. It was articulate this time.

"Hold on there! Wait a minute!"

No sign of the alarm that beat in his breast showed on Van's face. Outwardly he was less startled than Conners at the hail from the pier, but within he was keyed up, alert for what might happen.

Perhaps the owner of the voice was Knowles, who in some manner had broken his bonds. On the other hand, perhaps it was Rolph who at last had arrived tardily with his men. In either case, trouble would flame up furiously in a moment.

Casually, he dropped his hand to his pocket and his fingers rested on the butt of his gun. There was the sound of feet on the metal of the conning tower. Then a man descended into the chamber beneath.

THEN as Van saw his face he was as astonished as was Conners who stared at the newcomer with stark amazement in his eyes.

It was Rossi.

"God," said Conners. "How did you get here?"

Rossi did not answer the question. Instead he said excitedly: "Have the cops been here?"

Conners frowned, and a vague alarm crept into his eyes.

"The cops? No. Why?"

"Then get away at once," said Rossi. "They'll be heading this way any minute. I'll explain later."

Conners asked no further questions at that moment. Realizing that speed was more essential than information, he waved a signal to the skipper. The sailor shouted to his men. The conning tower clanged down into place.

A bell sounded tinnily through the stuffy chamber. The steel fish throbbed as her powerful engines turned over. Slowly, sluggishly she churned through the water.

"Now," said Conners. "What's the story, Rossi."

Rossi wiped a perspiring forehead with a handkerchief.

"Plenty," he said laconically. "Did you see anything of the Phantom? Are you sure he's not on board?"

"The Phantom?" said Conners, "how would he know about this boat?"

"I told him," said Rossi bitterly.

Conners glared at him and the little Italian made haste to explain his delinquency. While the colloquy

was going on Van stood calmly at one side smoking a cigarette, apparently amused by the recital, yet every muscle in his body was tensed, ready to move should anything happen.

"So," Rossi concluded his recital. "When we came out of the morgue, I shot the works. I slugged Rolph. Knocked him cold and scrammed. I figured I'd get here before he came to and gave the alarm. But the Phantom had a five minute start on me. It's funny he never got here."

Van lighted another cigarette. So, he reflected, this, then, was the reason that Rolph had not showed up. He decided that it might be wise now to show some concern in the matter.

"If the Phantom had a ten minute start," he observed, "maybe he's on board."

Conners looked up quickly.

"You're right," he said. "And if he is he'll be damned hard to find. He's a master at disguise. I'll suspect everyone now."

FOR a moment there was a tense silence broken only by the monotonous throbbing of the turbines.

At last Conners spoke again.

"Let every man, including the crew, assemble in the dining saloon, With the exception of those who are on duty, every one must appear there. If the Phantom is aboard, I mean to find out before he can do any damage. Quick now!"

Ten minutes later, a dozen anxious men set about the long table in the saloon. The crew eyed one another with puzzled glances. They had not the slightest idea what this all meant. Further they were inclined to be surly at having their leisure broken into.

The members of Conners' gang—Winton, Charters, and Rossi were frankly nervous. Already they had had most convincing evidence of the Phantom's ability to assume the character of another, and as Conners himself had said, every man was suspected. The gangsters glanced at one another, half believing that any one of the comrades whom they had worked with for years might prove to be that scourge of crime and evil—the Phantom.

Van, playing the role of Knowles to the hilt, appeared no less alarmed than the others. Shifty eyed he glanced surreptitiously at the others, as if he, too, suspected them of treachery.

Conners stood at the end of the table and addressed the gathering.

"There may be an enemy among us," he said slowly. "I'll admit I'm not sure. But I mean to find out. Each of you will pass before me. In your pockets all of you must have some papers—passports, licenses, some means of identification which contains your personal signature. You will show me these papers, then you will sign your name on another sheet of paper. If those signatures coincide, you are absolved of suspicion. Perhaps the Phantom cannot disguise his handwriting as easily as he can disguise his features."

Van restrained the grin that almost came to his face. For as a matter of cold hard fact, the Phantom could do just that. And Conners in devising this plan had defeated his own ends.

IN his pockets Van had some papers which he had taken from Knowles. Undoubtedly, as Conners had said, they contained specimens of his handwriting. Now if the gang leader had called on Van merely to write Knowles' name, that would have been the end right there.

For Van, never having seen the signature of the man he was im-

Rossi's hand clutched at his throat, and he fell, a gory hulk, to the floorplates.

personating, could not have possibly passed the test. For undoubtedly Conners was familiar with Knowles' handwriting.

But now, now that Conners had instructed each of them to first produce a paper that already had a signature upon it as a means to check up, it would give Van an opportunity to study the graphology of Knowles.

As the crew was filing past Conners submitting to his test, Van withdrew the documents that he had taken from his victim on the dock.

By the time his own turn had come he had thoroughly familiarized himself with Knowles' signature. With a steady and confident hand, he scrawled the man's name on the paper which Conners held out to him.

At last every one in the room had performed the routine. Conners stood at the end of the table, a worried expression in his eyes. He shook his head.

"We've proved nothing," he said. "Everything seems in order."

Winton leaped at the hope.

"Perhaps he didn't get here in time to get aboard," he suggested.

Rossi frowned.

"He left ahead of me," he observed. "And I had time to get here."

Conners' hand was in his pocket. He faced the men before him as he fingered the butt of his revolver. His face was anxious, worried. Van watched him keenly. Apparently he was safe for the time being. At least until such time as Conners thought up a better plan for testing the identity of his men.

Suddenly there rang out a shout from the control room. Conners sprang from his place at the table's

head and ran from the room. His comrades followed. Van brought up in the rear.

In the control room, the captain of the submarine stood staring through his periscope.

"Coast Guard cutter off the port bow," he announced. "She's signaling for us to stop."

"Submerge," said Conners.

"I've already given the order," replied the skipper. "But she's signalling that she'll fire on us if we don't stop."

Van said nothing. He stood there and watched the tableau in silence. He knew full well that the entire coast guard had been warned to watch out for any suspicious craft, in order to prevent the stolen jewels from leaving the country. Perhaps, now, this vessel might capture the submarine.

A vibration swept across the submarine. For a moment there was a break in the smooth throbbing chant of the turbines. The submarine jerked convulsively in the sea. "What's that?" said Winton, his face pale, anxious.

"She's fired across our bows to stop us," said the captain. "She'll sink us if we're not careful."

THERE was an instant's silence. Then Conners snapped out suddenly: "You've got torpedoes aboard. Haven't you?"

The captain nodded.

"Then what the hell are you waiting for?" asked Conners. "Sink her first."

For an instant the skipper removed his eyes from the periscope and stared at Conners. The latter fingered his gun suggestively.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" he demanded. "Sink her, or we'll all be at the bottom of the ocean."

The skipper glanced from the grim face of the gangster to the gun in his hand. Then he picked up a speaking tube at his side.

"Stand by the port torpedo tube," he ordered.

With his eyes glued again to the periscope, and one hand on the telegraph, he deftly maneuvered the craft around in position to sink the cutter. Again the submarine trembled violently as a second shot from the cutter plowed up the water by her stern.

The undersea craft was now submerging as fast as she possibly could, and at the same time she was swinging into position to deliver her treacherous death blow at the cutter.

DICK VAN LOAN watched the scene with apprehensive eyes. Even to preserve his own secret, even though it might mean a brutal and immediate death, he could not stand supinely by and see the Coast Guard vessel sunk wantonly.

For a while he did not move. He muttered a silent prayer that the vessel above would maneuver out of the way before the torpedo tube could be ranged for a fair shot.

Then he heard the skipper's exclamation of triumph, and he knew that if he did not act now it would be too late. The captain's hand grasped the telegraph. He picked up the speaking tube again. He opened his mouth to give the order which would shatter the steel of the craft above them, which would send a score of gallant men to their deaths.

But he never issued that order.

Before anyone in that chamber could divine his intention, Van sprang across the room. He snatched the tube from the captain's hand.

"Unload that torpedo," he shouted into its mouth. He thrust the skipper aside.

The submarine plunged deeper and deeper into the depths of the ocean. Van realized that this single moment's delay that he had achieved would save the Government vessel. By now the range was gone.

Conners recovered from his astonishment at the sight of Knowles daring to countermand his orders. Of a sudden the true explanation came to him.

"Get him," he cried. "That's not Knowles. That's the Phantom!"

The four gangsters closed in on Van. Swiftly he jerked his revolver from his pocket and stood his ground.

"A step nearer and you die," he said grimly.

For a moment they hesitated. Then, Rossi, still stinging with anger over the trick Van had perpetrated upon him earlier in the evening, lost his temper at the expense of his reason; lost his temper and then—lost his life.

"Charge him," he roared. "We're four to one. Don't let him bluff you." Even as he spoke his right hand dove for his gun. It came from his pocket spitting steel and flame. Two jagged streaks of fire punctuated the atmosphere. Two clanging reverberations sounded as the bullets roared over Van's head and ricocheted off the steel bulkhead.

HIS own finger pressed the trigger of his .38, and his aim was truer than that of the enraged Rossi. Rossi staggered forward. His hand clutched at his throat, then became stained crimson with his own blood. He fell a gory hulk to the floorplates.

But he had not died in vain.

During the interchange of shots between their comrade and the Phantom the other three had achieved a flank movement on Van. Now while Conners stood before him, Charters and Winton were at his sides. It was impossible to cover them all with his weapon. He trained it on Conners.

"Call your dogs off, Conners," he ordered. "Or you're a dead man."

For a moment Conners hesitated, as if about to comply reluctantly with Van's request. Then before he could make a reply, both Winton and Charters leaped at the Phantom simultaneously. From the corners of his eyes Van saw them coming. But there was little he could do to withstand the onslaught.

The muzzle of his weapon cracked downward, striking Winton on the side of the head, knocking him backwards. But at that same moment Charters' unwieldy body hurled itself upon the impostor. Despite his effort to remain on his feet, Van went down, Charters on top of him.

By now Conners was in the fray. He dropped to the floor at the side of the struggling pair and wrenched the revolver from Van's hand. Covering him, he spoke to Charters.

"All right. Let him up. I've got him covered."

Charters panting heavily disengaged himself from Van's grip and rose to his feet. Despite a fast swelling black eye, he wore a grin.

"I hope you'll listen to me this time, Conners," he said. "I'll kill him now and then we don't have to worry any more about the Phantom."

Van stood up. He was silent and grim as his eyes met those of Conners, as he waited to hear the sentence of death passed upon him.

CHAPTER XIV

A Living Torpedo

FOR A long moment Conners hesitated. Charters reached for his gun. Winton, coming out of the daze engendered by the

knock on his head, stared at Van with savage hatred.

"I'm in on this, too," he said with a harsh laugh. "I owe him something, too, Charters."

Van stood between them. Between two guns that thirsted for his life's blood. Murder shone from the eyes of both men. Then, when it seemed to him that his next struggle would be in the arms of death himself, Conners spoke.

"No," he granted the reprieve. "We better keep him for the big shot. He might be able to use him."

"Don't be a fool," said Charters. "He's dangerous as long as he's alive."

"Put him in the room with his nibs," said Conners. "He won't be dangerous there. My God, he can't escape from a submarine in the open sea, and we've got a long trip ahead before we get to Calcutta. The big shot's gone by boat. He'll be there before us. Let him decide what to do with him."

Charters reluctantly pocketed his gun. He seized Van roughly by the collar.

"Come on," he said.

THE pair of them left the room, stepping carefully over the prostrate figure of Rossi, who had escaped a prison cell only to meet a more drastic fate.

For days they had lain there. Side by side, the white man and the brown.

Cruel cords cut into the wrists and ankles. Choking gags desiccated the saliva in their mouths. The only moment of relief they had was at meal time.

Then their gags were removed. Their bonds were loosed; but always a guard sat with them while they ate, forbidding conversation. Then once more they were trussed up and left to lie uncomfortably upon the steel deck of the vibrating submarine.

Yet Van had counted the days as they passed. Counted them deliberately. It was the only way he could keep track of time. And now he estimated that the submarine must almost be at its destination. Little good that conclusion brought him however.

Little good an even more important fact which he had learned would do him, unless Fate herself should take a hand and offer him some opportunity of escape.

THOUGH they had bound him, though they had tied him up, they had not stopped his ears. He had overheard Conners telling his men of the rendezvous they had with the mysterious guiding spirit of this venture in Calcutta. And Van had committed that address to memory. Though, after days and days of this monotonous incarceration, it became more and more doubtful that he would ever be able to cash in on that knowledge.

The Rajah of Paruana who lay at his side wore an expression of utter and abject despair in his eyes. From time to time he shot a mute glance of appeal and misery at his companion in hardship. Yet no word had been passed between them. Conners and his men had seen to that. And then, at the propitious time, like a bolt from heaven itself, came opportunity.

They had just partaken of dinner. On Van's mental figures, he had estimated that if the submarine was capable of normal speed they should arrive at their destination within the next forty-eight hours at the most. Though it seemed more probable that twenty-four would see the end of this terrible trip.

Winton had taken his turn sitting guard over the prisoners as they

ate. And now that one of the crew had come and removed the dishes, the gangster proceeded to the business of tying them up once more.

Now, whether or not Winton, too, was being affected by the long dull monotony of the trip, whether he merely was in a hurry to return to the interminable game of cribbage that he played with Charters, Van never knew. But the fact remained that after the door of their cell clanged upon them, Van made the startling discovery that the bonds on his wrists were tied so loosely that he had a certain amount of play there.

He used this advantage to the full, and after some hours' manipulation the bonds were hanging loose on his wrists. Swiftly he ripped the gag from his mouth, untied his ankles, and then proceeded to perform the same services for the Rajah.

BUT the brown man did not seem particularly elated at the fact of his freedom.

"What can we do?" he asked "We are many feet under water. We cannot escape. They will kill us."

Van grinned. "They won't kill us that easily," he said. "Anyway, they're saving us to be killed by some special master mind in Calcutta. Now, you listen to me. We've got a fighting chance."

His spirit fired the Rajah with slightly more enthusiasm.

"In a few minutes," exclaimed Van, "I'm going to get them to open that door on some pretext. I'll overpower whoever opens it. Then you follow me. We'll make a dash for the torpedo room. Once there, we'll close and batten the bulkhead behind us. That'll hold them off for at least half an hour, and we don't need that long."

The Rajah regarded him with bewilderment stamped on his features.

"But what then?" he inquired in his precise Oxford accent. "What can we do in the torpedo room?"

"Just one thing," replied Van. "You're going to shoot me out through the tube."

The Rajah's bewilderment rapidly grew to stark surprise.

BUT you'll get killed," he expostulated. "It's four to one against anyone who takes that risk."

"Perhaps," said Van grimly. "But it's a thousand to nothing if I stay here. No, you shoot me from the tube, I'll show you how to manipulate it. Then with me on the outside, we can perhaps accomplish something."

He walked across the narrow room and kicked hard upon the door. That had become the accepted signal when the prisoners wanted anything. A few moments later, a key turned in the lock and Winton entered.

As the gangster opened the door he never knew exactly what happened to him. A hundred and eighty pounds of something fell on him. A savagely swung fist traveled through the air and landed at the point of his jaw. Winton slumped forward and fell on his face.

"Come on," cried Van to the Indian. And the pair of them raced from their prison into the corridor of the vessel. From behind them they heard Charters' voice.

"Look! They're out of the cell!"

Excited voices took up the cry, but still the two prisoners charged madly toward the bow of the vessel toward the torpedo room. Now from the rear came the sound of a revolver shot, and before them at the entrance to the chamber for which they were headed, one of the crew stood, ready to repel them.

Three more shots reverberated through the corridor and clanged off the steel of her sides. The seaman at the bulkhead swung his fists viciously as they approached. Van ducked, jabbed quickly with his left and followed up with a prodigious blow of his right hand.

They sprang across the fallen body of the sailor, entered the room and clanged the bulkhead door into place, dropping its bars just as the pursuers came up on the outside of the corridor.

Excited voices preceded a terrific pounding on the door with some heavy instrument. Hastily Van explained the workings of the torpedo tube to the Indian.

Then, taking a deep breath which he realized might well be his last, he climbed into the torpedo chamber. The Rajah clanged the door shut behind him.

For a few seconds that seemed an eternity, he waited, huddled up in the darkness of the steel chamber waiting for the compressed air blast which would send him plunging to the surface of the water. He held himself tensely, retaining the breath in his lungs.

HE knew that in order to rise he must ride through the sea in the center of the air bubble which would surround him. If he broke through his prison of oxygen, the pressure would kill him. His task would be easier if the submarine was not submerged to a great extent. But that knowledge was something he did not possess.

Something sped up from the rear of the chamber and struck his body with terrific force. He shot forward with terrific momentum. The outer valve of the chamber opened. His body vibrated with the shock as he shot from the vessel into the sea.

Madly, like a disembodied wraith, embarked on some metaphysical journey, he catapulted through the water in his strange vehicle of air. Then like a porpoise he shot out of the water, through into the air.

He fell back with a splash. For a moment he trod water while he regained his breath, then with long powerful strokes he began to swim.

Off to the east he saw a myriad of flickering lights, and he breathed a silent prayer of thanks that he had rightly estimated that the submarine had almost reached its destination. Overhead the stars twinkled eerily. There was no moon, and the sable of the tropical evening formed an effective screen should the submarine come to the surface and search for him.

Tirelessly he swam ahead toward the coral strand that was India's shore.

CHAPTER XV

The Purchase

IT WAS not yet dawn when Van Loan arrived at the address he had heard Conners mention as the gang's meeting place in Calcutta. Located on a narrow, filthy street, the building nevertheless had an appearance of luxury. It was a huge palace built in the oriental manner of architecture.

Standing near the iron gate to the courtyard was an abject native leaning against the wall. He was an incongruous figure in the deserted street. Van approached him.

"Ah," he said in dialect. "And why do you wait here so early, my brother?"

Somehow the native did not evince surprise at this white man who came up at this hour and conversed so freely in Hindustani.

"I am but a poor man," he responded. "A poor man whose only asset is the faith my masters have

in me. I come to be servant to the great sahib who lives within. I come recommended from a friend of his. I come early to impress my new master with my virtues. But, alas, I cannot enter until the sun rises. Hence, I wait."

Van's eyes narrowed. It had been his intention to gather the police to help him enter this house. But if he could so contrive it that he might yet play a lone hand, so much the better. If he could gain entrance single-handed and spy on the plotters, he would learn infinitely more than the police could, in hours of grilling.

"So," he said softly. "And do you know the great sahib who lives here? Has he ever seen you? Does he know you come?"

"He knows I come," said the native. "But he does not know me, save by my credentials when I present them."

"It is well," said Van. "And would you sell those credentials?"

The native regarded him with a new interest.

"That which is sold must have its price," he quoted.

"True," said Van. And at that moment it occurred to him that he had no money.

SWIFTLY he took an emerald ring from his finger, and handed it to the native.

"Is this sufficient price?" he asked.

The native examined it with wide eyes. Like all Orientals, he well knew the value of precious stones. He did not answer directly. Instead he took some papers from his pocket and handed them to Van.

"The price is sufficient," he said, then he slunk off into the darkness, leaving the Phantom in possession of the papers which would gain him entrance into the house of the conspirators.

Van walked briskly up the street. Before the sun pulled itself laboriously over the eastern horizon he had work to do. First, he must barter some more of his personal property for native clothes, and, then, too, he must disguise himself as the sort of person who would go with those clothes. Withal, he must do both these things swiftly.

CHAPTER XVI

BEWARE!

THE room was large. Huge marble columns ran smooth and slender from floor to ceiling. The woodwork was of ebony. Ivory images were skillfully worked into the paneling. Despite its splendor, the chamber was sparsely furnished.

A few dignified chairs were placed at intervals near the walls, and at the far end of the room, the floor raised itself, forming a dais. On this dais stood an ebony table. Behind it sat a man.

What manner of man it was could not be said. Even the servants of the place had never gazed upon his face. He was dressed in a long black robe, and over his features fell a white hood which, save for the piercing eyes that stared through two slits in his mask, entirely obscured his physiognomy.

The man behind the table seemed impatient. His index finger drummed nervously on the top of the table, and had his hood been removed a frown would have been seen upon his brows. At last a discreet tap on the door at the far end of the room roused him from his abstraction.

"Enter," he cried in Hindustani.

The door swung slowly open, and a turbaned servant entered. Approaching the dais, he bowed low.

"Sahib," he said in his native

tongue, "Hari Singh awaits without. There is a white man with him."

The eyes gleaming through the hood sparkled for a moment. Their owner said: "Send them in."

The servant salaamed and quitted the room. An instant later, flanked by two laden bearers, Hari Singh and Conners entered the room. Deferentially they approached the ebony table.

"Well," snapped the man at the table, "is the work done?"

Hari Singh bowed low.

"It is done, Sahib," he said. "Done well and completely. There remains little now save the consummation of our plans."

"The jewels?" said the hooded figure.

Hari Singh indicated the bearers.

"They are here."

"And the Rajah?"

"He is outside held by Sahib Conners' men."

FOR a second those gleaming restless eyes seemed satisfied. Then they clouded as if he had remembered something more.

"And the Phantom," he said this time in English, "what of him?"

Both Singh and Conners registered surprise. The Indian was far too awed by the hooded figure to speak what was in his mind, but the democratic Conners had no such scruples.

"How do you know about the Phantom?" he asked. "How do you know that we'd been bothered by him?"

The featureless white hood leaned across the desk. He spoke again in English.

"I know everything, Mr. Conners," he said quietly. "When I am gambling for an empire I overlook nothing. It shall be well if you remember that in your dealings with me."

He sat back again. Then repeated his former question.

"Now, what of the Phantom?"

HE is dead," said Hari Singh with a swift glance at Conners. Apparently he preferred his master to think that than to suspect that perhaps his men had failed. Conners picked up the cue. He said nothing.

"That is good," said the man at the table. "Now let me see the jewels."

Conners made a sign to the bearers. They placed a heavy chest down on the floor at the foot of the dais. Conners took a key from his pocket. The servant who had admitted them to the room stood close by. He raised his eyes inquiringly to those of the masked figure.

"Yes, Iraq," said the man. "Open it."

Iraq took the key from Conners, thrust it in the lock, and flung open the heavy lid of the chest. Half a dozen pairs of avid eyes stared at the glittering array, a king's ransom in jewels that gleamed there in the box.

Then the hooded man spoke again.

"What's that? That paper near the big diamond?"

Hari Singh stooped down over the chest. He picked up the small fluttering piece of paper that laid where those keen eyes had seen it from beneath the hood. Singh glanced at it hastily. On it were written some words in English. Six words, to be exact. But six words that struck terror in Hari Singh's heart. That dilated his eyes, and sent his heart to beating. That tied his tongue and froze the words of alarm that he would have uttered.

"What is it?" said the voice from the table. "Read it to me."

But Hari Singh stood immobile. The brown fingers which held the paper trembled as he stood there.

Conners leaned over his shoulder. His eyes scanned the words written there. An oath escaped his lips. He read aloud.

I still live. Beware!
The Phantom.

The eyes behind the table smoldered with a terrible wrath. They fixed themselves on the panic-stricken Singh.

"Dog," said an awful voice. "You dare lie to me! The Phantom lives. Why do you tell me he is dead?"

Conners, seeing that the Indian was still beyond speech, answered.

"Well," he said, "he disappeared anyway. He was on the submarine with us. We captured him. Then he disappeared. We searched the vessel from stem to stern, and he never turned up. He must have slid overboard."

"Overboard," said the masked man mockingly. "Apparently he's in Calcutta."

"He can't be," said Conners. "Why—"

"Then how do you explain that note?"

CONNERS frowned. In the excitement he had overlooked that point. The hooded man pressed him.

"Who had the key to that chest?"

"I did," said Conners weakly.

"You had the *only* key?"

Conners nodded. The eyes in back of the hood grew grim.

"Then you have a lot of explaining to do, Mr. Conners. How do you account for this note in a chest to which you had the only key. What proof do you offer me that you are not a spy? Indeed, how do I know that you are not the Phantom?"

But by now Conners had recovered from his bewilderment. Anger gave him courage.

"What's it to me what you think?" he said wrathfully. "My job was to deliver the jewels and the Rajah in Calcutta. For that I'm to get half a million pounds. I've done my job and I want my money. I don't have to give you any explanations, and you don't frighten me with your mask and phoney layout, no mater who the hell you are."

Hari Singh at his side gasped at these words. He knew that masked figure much better than the white man and he had seen men tortured until they had cried out for death, for less an offense than Conners had committed.

The man in the white hood glared at the white man. His eyes held murder and death.

"Conners," he said, "you dare much. You know not my power."

"The hell with your power," cried Conners. "Give me my money and let me go."

THE voice of the man behind the table became very soft, cajoling.

"Come here," he said quietly. "You shall get your money."

Conners took a step forward, nearer the dais. The low voice continued:

"But before you get your money you must be taught a lesson. You must be taught that to defy me is to suffer. To—"

There was something dire in that voice. Something evil and threatening that at last permeated Conners' senses. He was suddenly aware of danger. Vague and intangible—yet perilous. In a swift panic of fear that he scarcely understood himself, his hand flashed down to his hip.

It jerked upward again holding a .44 which was leveled at the white hood.

"None of your tricks now," he cried. "Pay me, and I'll get out.

Try anything funny with me, and you'll get a load of lead through that mask."

"You are a fool," said the man in the mask, "and for that also you shall be taught a lesson."

A faint, almost imperceptible, click sounded in the room. The floor beneath Conners' feet dropped like a gallows trap. What had been solid shining mahogany was suddenly a gaping black void. The white man stumbled forward. His gun fell from his grasp as his arms shot upward in a desperate endeavor to save himself. Then he shot through space. Down, down, into the darkness below.

Hari Singh shuddered as he disappeared. The native servants stood blandly silent. The vagaries of their master were not new to them. From the opening in the floor there came a horrible scream of terror, that echoed ominously through the room like a banshee's wail.

CHAPTER XVII

TORTURE

THE masked man chuckled. Then from below Conners' inarticulate shriek evolved to speech.

"For God's sake take me out of here! What is this thing? God, it's coming close to me. It's—"

The relentless voice from behind the hood broke in.

"Have you learned your lesson, Mr. Conners?"

"Yes," shrieked the white man. "Anything. I'll do anything. Only get me out of here."

The robed figure picked up a small hand phone from the desk. He spoke rapidly into the mouthpiece in Hindustani. The shrieks from below ceased. The floor slowly moved upward into place, and a moment later, Conners was led through the rear door, supported by a turbaned servant.

Once again the white man stood before the dais. But now his demeanor was entirely changed. No longer did his cocky confidence permeate his bearing. No longer did defiance shine from his eyes. He was abject, afraid. He cringed before the hood. His teeth chattered. And his face was white, ashen.

"God," he said in a tremulous voice. "What was it? I saw two great eyes in the darkness. I heard the scraping of something on the floor. Something hairy touched me. Some—"

"It was a spider. Mr. Conners," a suave voice assured him. "A most unusual spider. And not a poisonous one at that. Nevertheless, one to be feared. It is a huge Sind spider. These are prehistoric animals which fortunately have been preserved and bred down to the present day by some few ancient families. It is an excellent creature. It crushes men to death, and then devours them. Fortunately for you, it had been fed recently. It is sluggish after eating. I keep it as my private executioner. It sheds less blood than a bullet. It also disposes of a corpse."

Conners shuddered at the coldbloodedness of the fiend before him. The relentless mercilessness of the hooded man who let nothing stand in the way of his ambitions.

"All right," said Conners. "I'm sorry I flew off the handle. But if it's just the same to you, I'd like my money."

THE covered eyes regarded him speculatively.

"You'll get your money. But not at this moment. First, you must stay until I am assured that you are not in league with the Phantom. Second, I am short of white men. I

need them to officer the native troop that I shall use shortly."

Conners started to protest, but the other cut him short.

"In the meantime," he said, "let us examine the Rajah. Now that we have the jewels, we only need a little information from him in order to complete our plans."

Hari Singh walked to the outer door. A moment later he returned escorting Charters and Winton, who between them dragged a handcuffed man into the room. They stopped with him before the table and the proud eyes of the Rajah of Paruana gazed steadily into the cold, cruel black slits in the hood.

"Prince," said the voice, "I desire to learn something from you."

THE Rajah, with the blood of the proudest clan in India in his veins, smiled defiantly.

"You shall learn nothing from me," he said. "I understand your plans only too well, though at first I did not know what was behind all this. You have the jewels, true. But that other thing you shall never have. You shall never find."

Hari Singh stepped forward.

"Don't be a fool," he said in their native tongue. "You can achieve nothing but death. Tell him what he must know and go your way in peace."

The Rajah turned and glared at Singh.

"No, my perfidious step-brother," he said in stinging accents. "You are the jackal who this time shall follow a disappointed lion. I say nothing."

The hooded man signaled to the servants.

"Bring the table," he said. "The table and a knife."

A moment later a long table was set up before the dais. The servant, Iraq, handed his master a long cruel knife. Its blade curved sharply as if in horror at the things it had witnessed.

And now for the first time during this audience, the hooded man stood up. He stepped down from the dais.

"Seize him," he said. "Tie him."

Iraq and another flung the helpless Rajah on the table and bound him. The robed figure bent over him, holding the gleaming blade of his knife over his breast.

"Shall you talk? Shall you tell me where is this thing I desire?"

"No," said the Rajah of Paruana.

The hand that held the knife moved closer to the helpless man's breast. The blade pricked the skin at his throat. It bit into the flesh, and moved slowly toward the jugular.

The Rajah's hands gripped the side of the table in a terrible grip. His eyes were distended, staring agonizingly at the ceiling. The muscles of his face were tensed and set. Hari Singh averted his head. And Conners, the white man who in his own country was considered hard and cold, shuddered as he watched the relentless purpose in those glittering eyes, as he saw the desperate purpose in that steady hand that wielded the blade.

"Shall you talk?" asked the voice again.

The Rajah shook his head. His suffering had put him beyond words now.

Again that blade—crimson dulled its brightness now—descended to its horrible work. Again it pierced the flesh and moved, flaying alive the man who lay beneath it.

Then of a sudden the Rajah's eyes closed. His fingers lost their tenseness. He fainted.

The knife was lifted clear of his body. The man in the mask spoke as casually as if he were discussing the weather.

"We shall postpone these operations until he recovers consciousness," he announced. "You gentlemen can be served luncheon off the corridor. I shall eat alone. Iraq, revive the Rajah. Give him water."

He strode from the room; and the horrified hushed group who remained silently made their way out of the room. A little refreshment would not be amiss now, to soothe their broken nerves.

Iraq, the servant, glided softly across the floor on his bare feet. With one hand he lifted the Rajah's head. With the other he poured a cool draught of water down the suffering man's parched throat. The Indian stirred uneasily.

Iraq cast a swift glance about the room. No one was there save himself and the prostrate man. Then after emptying the contents of the glass at the other's lips, he moved noiselessly from the chamber, leaving the bound prince to solitude.

SOME few minutes later the Rajah stirred again. Now his eyelids fluttered, then opened and stared once more at the ceiling. He moved slightly. He was aware that something was in his hand. He raised his head as much as his bonds allowed, then glanced down at his fingers.

His bonds were about his wrists, yet they left some play to his fingers. Crumpled in the digits of his left hand he saw a piece of dirty paper. With difficulty he straightened it out. His eyes ran over the terse message that was scrawled upon it. His heart beat rapidly.

Then a gleam of hope drove the pain from his eyes. A vague smile flickered across his face; and death invisible and gaunt at his side, moved back a pace.

Then of a sudden he heard footsteps approaching the chamber The white hooded man entered again, and observing that the Rajah was conscious once more, he came forward, the red-stained knife in his hand eager, thirsty for blood.

Again he leaned forward over the body of the helpless prince.

"And now," he said, "do you talk, oh, Maharajah?"

THE Rajah raised his head slightly.

"I shall talk," he said slowly, with great effort. "That which you seek is to be found in the vaults beneath my palace. Enter the third door from the left on the underground corridor. There is the thing that you desire."

A sibilant hiss of satisfaction was audible beneath the white hood.

"You have done well," he said. "For this I may yet spare your life. Ah, what is that?"

Like a hawk's talon, his black gloved hand darted out and seized the Rajah's wrist in a grip of iron. The palm was wrenched open and the slip of paper that the prince had endeavored to conceal was brought to light.

The black gloved hand seized it, opened it. The little gleaming eyes read its message. Then from behind the hood, his voice rang out, alarmed and imperious:

"Iraq! Singh!"

The servant and the group from the refreshment room came running to the chamber. The hooded man brandished the slip of paper wildly.

"Listen," he cried. "He told me where I could find that which we seek. Then after he had spoken I found this in his hand."

He read aloud:

Tell them where it is in a loud voice that I may hear. I shall get there and take it first.

The Phantom.

"It was in his hand," he repeated. "The Phantom is here. In this place. Before God he shall not get out alive!"

Conners' face grew red with wrath.

"The Phantom," he roared. "I've sworn to kill him myself."

He leaned over the prostrate figure of the Rajah. His hands were at the other's throat.

"Who gave you that?" he demanded. "Who—"

But overcome by the terrible strain the Rajah once again had fainted. The hooded man took command.

"He is here," he said. "He must be. Permit no one to leave the house. The Rajah has talked. I have the information I want. What matters it now if he tried to betray us. Now we know the Phantom is under this roof our task is easy. Perhaps he observes us now. If so he shall witness the death of one of our enemies. Let that teach him the folly of double dealing with me."

As he had been speaking the sinister figure in the hood had worked himself up into a terrible wrath. He took a step toward the unconscious figure of the Rajah, and lifted the red knife high above his head. In his black rage he was impelled to destroy, to kill sadistically and wantonly. Red and silver the blade descended through the air toward the supine man's undefended breast.

Once more the Reaper lifted his scythe and came closer to the table.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Trap

THERE was but one man in the room at that moment who knew precisely what happened next. And that man was the Phantom!

Crack!

A single staccato report ripped through the dignity of the chamber. A ringing metallic clang sounded. The red and silver knife flew from its master's hand, spun crazily, dripping blood as it went, then clattered down upon the floor.

Despite the devils of pain which bit at his numbed hand, the hooded figure did not cry out. For a single instant, sheer and utter amazement paralyzed him as it did the others in the room. Then he dominated the situation.

"The Phantom is here," he cried. "After him. The shot came from this direction."

HE withdrew a revolver from the folds of his robe and ran across the room. Behind him came the others, guns held firmly in their hands. All enmity was forgotten between the various factions in that moment as they joined forces against the common foe.

Through the doorway at the side of the dais they rushed. The masked man's foot struck something soft and yielding. A groan of pain came to his ears. He stopped and, glancing down at his feet, saw the prone figure of Iraq. He stooped, seized him by the shoulders and jerked the servant to his feet.

"Quick, man. What happened? Where is he?"

"He struck me, sahib. A man with a black mask. He struck me down and fled."

The horde of them raced past the trembling servant, charging madly down the hall. Then there came to their ears a sound which stopped their pounding feet dead in the hallway.

A voice even as tempered steel, yet ominous as the shadow of death itself, came from the room they had just quitted, hurled there by an expert gift of ventriloquism.

"Fools! Would you try to catch the Phantom!"

"My God!" cried Conners. "He's in there!"

They turned, the mob of them, in an instant. They raced back, past the still quaking Iraq to the room they had just quitted. With their weapons held ready to plunge lethal steel into the body of their appropriately named enemy, they stood on the threshold staring into the chamber. Save for the prostrate form of the bound Rajah, the room was empty!

Conners, the practical man of the Occident, licked dry lips. His face was paler than it had ever been before. He, who could face a tangible corporal enemy with fortitude, was panic-stricken at this Phantom, this wraith who apparently could disappear into thin air.

Hari Singh gave vent to a cry.

I HAVE it," he said. "It's the Rajah himself. The Phantom impersonated him once. He's doing it again."

The eyes in the hood shot a withering glance at him.

"And how, fool," he asked contemptuously, "did the man who is bound shoot the knife from my upraised hand?"

Singh lapsed into silence. Slowly the group entered the room. Their eyes pierced every corner. Now somewhat recovered from his fright, Iraq entered behind them. The hooded man, seeing him, ordered: "Iraq, call all my servants here at once. We'll search every inch of the house. Tell them to arm themselves."

Iraq bowed and glided swiftly from the room, and as he did so, Fate, the great joker, touched with her finger the mighty web the Phantom had spun, touched it lightly, yet ripped it to pieces and changed its design from one of triumph to a trail of death.

ON the wall, near the door through which the servant passed, was an ornate decoration in the shape of a miniature Siva. The metal arm of the god was stretched forth to the east. As Iraq glided swiftly by, this arm caught at his turban.

The metal stuck in the cloth and knocked the headgear from its place. It fell to the floor, and with it fell something else, something which rang like silver as it dropped on the floor. Iraq bent swiftly to retrieve his turban. But swift as he was, the hooded man was quicker.

True, it was not the turban for which his gloved fingers reached. Instead it was for a small gleaming object which rolled at his feet. The thing which had been contained in the wound cloth from the servant's head.

He snatched it up, glanced at it. It was a gold insignia, and embossed upon it in platinum was a design in the form of a mask. The hooded man uttered a roar of rage—and triumph. For now verily his enemy was delivered into his hands.

"Seize him," he cried. "It's the Phantom!"

The servant he had called Iraq underwent a remarkable metamorphosis in that instant. No longer was he a servile Mohammedan of low caste. No longer was he the kowtowing menial of the East. The respectful homage fled from his bearing, and a fighting defiance swept over him.

Even as the revolver of Charters cracked its message of death toward him he ducked low, and whipped an automatic from his girdle. His fingers constricted on the trigger and two shots plunged from its barrel. Charters uttered a cry of pain, and blood dropped to the floor from an

arm which dangled uselessly at his side.

Then the unturbaned brown man turned and flew like a maniac down the corridor. Behind him came six men, death in their hearts—and in their hands.

The Phantom raced up a broad stone staircase at the far end of the hall, and there on its top he made his last stand. He leaned over the balustrade, his gun in his hand, waiting until his pursuers rounded the corner which revealed him to sight.

"Another step," he warned as they saw him, "and a man dies!"

For a second they hesitated. All of them had had before this most convincing evidence as to the marksmanship of the man who held them at bay. But now down the hall behind the white men came a score of the brown followers of the hooded man. Apparently their master held their lives more cheaply than his own.

Standing where he was, he turned to them.

"Charge him," he shouted in their dialect. "A thousand rupees to the man who brings him down."

For an instant they hesitated, then like the fatalists they were, they charged the stairway, curved knives flashing in their hands as they came.

VAN LOAN'S weapon spat savagely into the air. Two steel slugs left its barrel, hurtled through the atmosphere and plunged finally into brown flesh. The pair of Hindus at the head of the troop stumbled on the bottom step. Their hands flew up as in a gesture of supplication. The brown skin suddenly became red. They fell prone in their tracks. The others hesitated.

For a moment the eyes which gleamed through the hood grew anxious. True, he realized that it was inevitable that superior numbers alone insured the capture of this intruder who had dared challenge him, but how many men must he lose ere that capture was effected? Then abruptly, his gaze grew hopeful, as did the faces of the other white men who stood there.

Van read their expressions aright. He turned swiftly to cope with a new danger that he suddenly knew was behind him. As he swerved swiftly, he saw a brown face at his back. A black object was in a sepia hand. It was swinging down on him through the air.

HE ducked agilely. The club missed his skull for which it had been aimed and struck him a tremendous blow on the shoulder. He staggered with the force of it, and before he could recover his balance, a hand stretched out and seized the wrist which wielded his revolver.

Van Loan's left hand slashed out in a short uppercut which carried behind it every ounce of strength which he possessed. The Indian reeled, staggered, his grip loosened on Van's wrist.

But too late. The damage was done now. For during the struggle at the head of the stairs, the Hindus had raced, yelling and screaming, up the staircase. As Van turned to confront them, they were upon him. Half a dozen clawing hands dragged him down. His weapon was torn from his grasp. And a moment later he was held, breathless and defiant, between two natives, confronting two sinister eyes which peered at him between the slits of a hood white as the death which lurked in its owner's evil heart.

"You shall die for this," said the hooded figure. "Die unpleasantly, as Mr. Conners can testify."

He shot a look at the gangster, and Conners, remembering his experience below with the hairy monster, shuddered.

"Give him to the beast," said the masked man. "We have no time to spare to watch his sufferings. We must leave for Paruana immediately. Take him away."

THE brown men dragged Van down the stairs to the chamber whence he had come. Despite the desperate struggle which he put up, he was by far too much outnumbered to achieve anything. Yet his senses were alert. Characteristically, even in the moment when his own life hung in the balance, he overlooked nothing. Now, his ears became conscious of a fragment of conversation behind him.

"Let us go now," Conners was saying. "We've done our part. Give us our money, and we'll be off."

The metallic sinister voice which dominated all of them then replied:

"Not yet, Mr. Conners. As I told you, I need white men who can fight. I can use you and your two friends. Do you realize that you are known to the police regarding this robbery? If you go out in the city, I can have you apprehended. No, my dear sir, I still need you. But I can promise you extra payment for your services."

Conners grumbled something in answer to this that Van did not hear, for now he was standing in the council room, before the dais where stood the throne of the master.

The natives held him there firmly for a moment. Then the hooded figure entered the room and took his seat at the table. He addressed the Hindus.

"Stand clear!"

In a single frightened bound the men released their prisoner and sprang to one side. Even as they did so, Van felt the floor move beneath his feet. It was too late to leap aside now. It was too late to do anything save—

In a final desperate endeavor he thought of one thing. If death were about to claim him the single act which might yet frustrate the mad plan of the masked man was the latter's end.

As the trap was sprung, he plunged his hand into his loin cloth and brought out an automatic—his reserve weapon that he had had no chance to use before. He aimed point blank at the hooded figure who sat like a gloating cobra behind the table. His finger tensed upon the trigger, and the gun spat its message of death squarely at the fiend who plotted the destruction of Paruana.

CHAPTER XIX

Man Against Monster

BUT the trap moved so swiftly, so suddenly, that the bullet was thrown far too high. In the last instant before he disappeared through that sinister opening to meet the horrible death below, Dick Van Loan lost his head for one of the few times in his career.

Seething with bitter rage, with a terrible hatred for the white hooded beast before him, in that instant he was aware of nothing save a blind, a mad desire to injure the hooded man. Realizing that his shot had gone wild, he drew back his right arm.

And then, just as he was slipping through that sable oblong of space, he hurled his weapon with all his strength at the saturnine figure behind the table.

Whether or not it hit its mark he never knew. But as he was flung violently to the floor below, he heard

a low chuckle. He heard that hated voice say: "Good. He has unarmed himself. Now he can face our hairy friend with his bare hands."

There was the slamming sound of wood striking wood above his head as the floor rose into place again, leaving the Phantom in darkness to realize the utter and terrible truth of the last words he might hear on this earth.

For a moment he lay where he had landed, orienting himself. He first became conscious of the fact that he was squatting, not on a floor, but on the earth itself, mud and slime seeped through his garments.

Then as his eyes became accustomed to the gloom of the chamber in which he had been so precipitately catapulted, he realized that it was not entirely dark. Overhead there burned a tiny electric bulb which shed a faint and eerie glow through the dungeon.

He glanced around for a moment, then as his vision became clearer—*he saw it!*

At the far end of the cell two glowing balls of agate fire stared at him. They shed no light. Yet it seemed as if a cold unearthly undimensional illumination emanated from them. Now, he could see that that glowed from the center of a huge web which ran from the slimy ground to the roof.

THE strands of the web were as thick as stout rope. They were gray and glistening strangely, and in the center of them there lurked the most horrible beast he had ever seen.

Beyond the eyes, its body came to his vision. Hairy and ugly, legs like the tentacles of octopi, coat like a Shetland, a black mouth like the adit to some cave of terror. All in all, he estimated that the diameter of the beast could not possibly be less than five feet.

He stood up. Fear he had known on some few occasions in his life. Death and he had grappled ere this and his heart had been stout; his nerves steady. But never before had the poison of sheer terror deluged his veins. Never before had the normal man's abhorence of filth and unclean things vibrated his nerves as this awful monster which he faced.

THOUGH he had never seen the counterpart of this creature before he was familiar with its breed. He had already heard the hooded man call it the Sind Spider, and of that beast he had some knowledge from his exhaustive researches.

He knew its bite was not poisonous. Nature in creating an insect so powerful in other respects had denied it that weapon. However, it was a huge thing of tremendous strength. Its web was strong enough to catch and hold a man.

Once enmeshed in those strands, the creature would spin more strands around its writhing victim until he was held helpless and supine, totally at the mercy of its sucking mouth. A mouth which would gradually strip the flesh from the bone, which would suffer a man horrible living death by a torture that no man-made weapon was capable of.

A fitting fiendish weapon for the man upstairs who maintained it as —to quote himself—his executioner.

The beast had not moved since Van had been flung into its lair. He recalled what its master had said about its having dined recently and being sluggish. Well, that would give him time, anyway. Time in which to steel his nerves again, to cast off the paralyzing horror which had laid its cold hand on his very heart.

Then he saw one of those glowing orbs move. He heard a slimy slither as a hairy leg swept across the rope like web. Strangely enough, that motion, that overt threat of peril, steadied him. His nerves became ice cold again. He was in perfect possession of all his faculties once more. His mind and muscles began to co-ordinate. Ideas flicked through his brain.

HIS mind swiftly and orderly selected and discarded the things which ran through it. Finally, it made its decision. Hastily he ripped the sheet-like garment which covered his shoulders from his body. He ripped it with his hands and as he did so he noticed with satisfaction that his fingers were steady.

Then bending over that muddy, slimy floor he scraped up wet earth and crammed it into the cloth. He packed it down hard with all his strength. Then he made it secure by tying it at the point where the hard-packed mud stopped.

About three feet of cloth remained, as a sort of tail, to the strange bulky mud-containing end of it. Tentatively he swung it about his head. Those five odd pounds of hard-packed earth had made him a serviceable club.

It was a makeshift, true. But it was a weapon. Something with which to face the monster. Something, if luck should lend a hand, something with which to slay it.

He advanced slowly. Heaven knew he would have preferred to wait. It is not pleasant to walk out to meet death in its grimest, most awful guise. Yet he dared not delay. He knew full well that the spider would be easier to overcome while its lethargy remained. Not later when the pangs of hunger gave it greater courage, greater strength.

Closer he walked toward those flaming eyes that stared unwinking, exercising a repulsive hypnosis upon their victim. He shuddered and lowered his gaze. His rude club was held behind him ready for a prodigious blow at a vital spot. He realized that if he missed the first time, there might never be a second chance.

Nearer and nearer he advanced. At first the gigantic insect watched him dispassionately, indifferently, as if, sure of its own power, it feared nothing. Yet as he came closer, it moved, conscious of danger.

Van Loan's ankle struck something soft and yielding. He essayed to withdraw it, but it stuck. Glancing down swiftly, he noticed that his leg had come in contact with the lower part of the web. It scarcely touched him, yet he could feel the stickiness of it. With a tremendous jerk, he yanked himself free.

Then, at that moment, as though the creature had decided that its adversary had become entirely too bold, the spider moved all its legs at once and came scurrying down from the center of the web to meet its foe.

VAN stood his ground. As in all of its specie, he knew that the animal's vulnerable spot was the soft part of its body that encased its brain. A blow accurately placed there would result in paralysis of the nerve centers even if not in immediate death.

With his club of mud and cloth held in readiness behind him, Van stood immobile and awaited the attack, awaited the moment when his blow could inflict the most damage.

The creature came nearer. Then stopped. It thrust forward one of its hairy tentacles tentatively as if to measure the mettle of its foe. Van did not move as the sticky fur grazed his cheek, though through

his whole being ran revulsion. The pit of his stomach was suddenly empty. He retched on an empty throat.

THE black cavernous mouth of the beast opened wide. The eyes glowed avidly. It ducked its head low, the better to reach its victim. For a fleeting instant the base of the skull afforded a fair shot—and in that instant Van swung with every ounce of his strength in the blow, and a muttered prayer to heaven upon his gray lips.

With a horrible crunching sound the club landed, and in the next second Van lived through an eternity of torture. If his thrust took no effect, this was the end indeed. But—

The creature stopped dead, hanging in its web. It was not dead, for its hairy arms moved slightly. Yet the blow had done its work, striking at the base of the brain it had momentarily stunned the beast.

Van lifted his weapon again and brought it down in the same spot. Again came that sickening crunching sound. Suddenly the filthy insect tumbled down from its web unexpectedly and took him unawares.

The huge body struck him fairly. Its weight knocked him down to the slimy floor; and for an instant he lay beneath that terrible figure—scarcely the less terrible because it no longer lived.

With a shudder he flung the evil thing from him and came to his feet. True, he had been the victor in that awful struggle, but at what a price. A clammy sweat enveloped him, and there was a faint trembling sensation in his legs. He moved away from the dead thing on the slimy floor, and despite the filth of the place, he sat down panting hard.

For a long moment he sat there recovering his strength, regaining control of his shattered nerves. Then at last he stood up again; and now as he gazed down at the crushed monster at his feet, the surge of victory came over him. Confidence returned, as he realized that now he had faced the most terrible thing of all, the greatest peril that this adventure could offer him and he had come through unscathed.

After this, whatever evil, whatever jeopardy the trail of the hooded maniac had to offer, would be little.

CHAPTER XX

Singing Steel

BUT still he was trapped. Although he had disposed of the death in that cell, he had not overcome the problem of his incarceration. He cast about for a means of escape.

Save for the trap door above, there was but one means of access to the prison. At the side, cut into the stone wall, was a door of steel. It must have been through that, he reflected, that Conners had been released.

He examined the door carefully. There was neither lock nor handle on the inside. It could only be opened from the exterior. And then, even as he was contemplating it, he heard a faint footfall without.

Swiftly he stepped back and seized his makeshift club firmly in his hand. He thrust his back up against the wall, and waited silently with bated breath.

Slowly the portal swung open. A brown face peered cautiously through the aperture. This, apparently, was one of the hooded master's men. coming to ascertain if his lord's enemy was yet dead.

The servant's black eyes caught sight of the inert spider in the center of the room. Encouraged by

the belief that the insect was engaged in its Caucasian meal, he opened the door a trifle wider in order to investigate more closely. He thrust his black, oily head through the doorway and peered into the semi-darkness of the chamber.

That semi-darkness grew to ebony blackness in an instant. Van swung his club once more. It whistled through the air as it hurtled down upon the luckless servant's skull.

WITHOUT a word, the man dropped, an inert heap at Van's feet. The white man stooped quickly and ran dexterous fingers through the other's garments. There he found and appropriated a long, wicked knife.

Hastily he thrust it into his own belt, and then fled gratefully from the horrible prison which had yielded up its dead at last.

He found himself in a long corridor of stone. The light was dim and eerie. He proceeded cautiously, gripping the knife he had appropriated steadily in his hand.

He soon came upon a flight of steps that led to the upper part of the house. He ran swiftly up the steps, and emerged into the corridor which led past the chamber where the hooded man had held his counsel.

He paused on the threshold of the room, and peering in, made out the figure of the Rajah where he had last seen him, bound on the table. Two servants, armed with Ghurka's knives, guarded the room, but of Singh and the others there was no sign. Apparently, fortified with the knowledge they had sought, they were already on the way to Paruana.

Well, time enough to cope with that angle of the plot later. Van realized that his immediate job was to get the real Rajah out of this house of death. It would have been a simple enough matter had he possessed a gun. In all probability these natives were armed solely with knives. He cursed himself for a fool for hurling his concealed weapon at that white face.

Surprise, he decided, was a necessary part of the attack. If he could overcome the guards before they had time to give the alarm which would reenforce them, so much the better. So, without further delay, he charged.

He appeared in the room, a dishevelled, wild-eyed wraith of vengeance to the Hindus. His hair was awry, blood and sweat covering the body on which the brown dye he had applied had begun to fade. In his hand was a gleaming wicked knife.

However, despite the threat of the steel, he used his fist alone on the first native. The man stared at him, a bewildered expression on his face, too startled to defend himself in time from this strange, unkempt thing that hurled itself upon him.

Van's left shot out like a steel spring. It caught the servant flush upon the point of the jaw. He staggered back and before he could recover, that left again, like a darting snake, plunged in with a second blow.

The man dropped like a felled ox. His companion, however, was not as easy. He had the advantage of more time in which to collect his scattered wits. As Van stepped over the fallen figure of the first guard, he prepared to meet him.

The curved blade in his hand swished through the air. Van sidestepped swiftly, and the steel of the knife ripped his garment as it descended. For a single second the man was off balance; but a single second was enough.

Van touched the bending man's brown back with the point of his blade.

"Drop your knife," he said in Hindustani, "and make no noise, or this blade shall pierce your heart."

The man gasped in fear. His weapon fell with a clatter to the floor. Slowly he straightened up. Van nodded his head toward the figure of the bound Prince of Paruana.

"Release him," he ordered.

The Indian untied the cord that bound the helpless Prince with trembling fingers. Yet, although he was now free, the Rajah did not move. Exhaustion and agony had taken their toll and once again he lay unconscious on the table.

Van's knife still pressed against the flesh of the native.

"Tell me," he said hastily, "how best can I get out of this house unobserved? And should you choose to lie to me, death shall be your reward."

The native swallowed hard. Then he pointed through the window to a postern at the rear of the back courtyard. "The rear gate," he said. "It has no guard."

Van nodded. With his gleaming blade still threatening the other, he bound him with the ropes that had held the Rajah, then lifting the unconscious man, he slung him over his shoulder and walked swiftly from the room.

He met no further mishap in the house. The native had spoken truly. No guard barred his way through the gate. He emerged, a weary, staggering figure into an evil-smelling narrow lane. He was free!

AT the corner a native policeman stood regarding him suspiciously as he stood there with his human burden. As soon as Van caught sight of him, he made his way toward the big Sikh. Before the officer could question him, Van thrust the Rajah into his arms.

"This is the Rajah of Paruana," he said hastily. "He's hurt badly. Get him to a hospital."

The astounded officer opened his mouth to question him, but before he could say a word, the dishevelled appearing Indian slid swiftly into the passing throng and was lost to sight in the stream of Oriental humanity that lined the narrow street.

CHAPTER XXI

Van Pays a Visit

THE Indian night had come down, swift and dark. The sky above was permeated by a thousand twinkling stars toward which the mosques of Calcutta reared their proud white heads.

In a trim bungalow on the outskirts of the town, the British Resident Commissioner sat smoking his post prandial pipe. He was a big, fleshy man who suffered much with the heat. Now he sprawled luxuriously in the cool of the evening.

He was suddenly aware of a presence other than his own on the screened veranda. Thinking it was one of his servants, he said negligently: "That's all, Ali. You may retire now."

He was astounded to hear a voice, grimly humorous, reply in perfect English: "I wish I could retire now, Major. Only I'm afraid the task has just begun."

The bulk of Major Hammersly started in its chair. He turned his head swiftly and beheld a man clad immaculately in the white dress clothes of the tropics. The man was tall and well built. His chin was square and determined; and on the upper half of his face he wore a black silk mask.

Instinctively, the Major's hand reached for his belt, then realizing that he had removed his holster be-

fore dinner, he stopped the gesture and said brusquely: "And, sir, who are you?"

The man in the mask uttered two words to establish his identity. For a full second the Major stared at him through the darkness, then of a sudden he sprang to his feet.

"Good heavens!" he said. "Sit down, sir. The police of three continents are looking for you. I was warned that I might see something of you here in Calcutta. Have a drink?"

Van sat down at Hammersly's side and slowly sipped the whiskey and soda that the Englishman prepared for him. As he did so, he gave the official a brief outline of the adventures which had befallen him since that memorable night so long ago when he had left New York.

WHEN he finished, Hammersly looked grave.

"So," he commented. "When, at first, you undertook the task of impersonating the Rajah in order to insure his arriving with the genuine jewels, I believed that it was merely a precaution against theft. The loss of the gems would have dealt the Rajah a severe financial blow which his enemies would have taken advantage of.

"But now it seems there is more to this than meets the eye. For some time some undercover agents have been attempting to stir up discontent in Paruana. In fact, ever since a syndicate was refused concessions by the Rajah himself."

"Then," said Van, "it begins to look that perhaps the syndicate stole the jewels in order to weaken the Rajah's position, in order to empower their own ruler who would be more generous to them."

Hammersly nodded.

"That's a sound theory," he observed. "And if that's true, we're in a bad hole."

"Why?" asked Van. "Can't you send troops up there to wipe out this gang of the hooded man. It's a certainty that his outfit is headed that way now."

Hammersly frowned.

"Hardly," he admitted. "The Government's policy is peace at any price. Troops would not be sent unless you had proof positive which would convince the Army authorities that it was essential to the welfare of India. If in some way we could send agents to Paruana to convince the people of the Province that their true Rajah is the man for them, we could of course send troops without trouble to protect the people.

"But it's essential that the people are on our side. Your hooded friend must know full well enough that he can do nothing if the natives are against him. That's why I suspect that he's got something up his sleeve, something which will turn the residents of the place to his man."

VAN lit a cigarette, puffed at it and sat silent, lost in thought. Slowly he pieced part of the puzzle together. And behind the mental picture that he conjured up he saw the hooded man, the master mind who had planned the whole thing. Conners and Hari Singh were simply pawns in the game. Pawns that themselves did not see the whole plan of their master.

Assuming that there was more than coincidence to the fact that discontent in Paruana had reared its head when the Syndicate had been denied concessions, it was quite possible that the hooded man's interests lay in that direction.

Obviously Conners had been told to steal the jewels in order to em-

barrass the real Rajah rather than any immediate mercenary reason of the mysterious man in the white hood. The gems were so well-known that on his own hook Conners, realizing that it was impossible to dispose of them, would never have gone to the elaborate trouble of taking them.

The mystery of the gems was easy enough. But what was this other thing that the masked man had said they needed? What was this thing the location of which they had tortured the Rajah to find? The answer to that, Van realized, was probably the answer to the whole affair.

"I have an idea," he said to Hammersly. "There are certain questions that must be answered, and I believe that perhaps the Rajah himself can answer them. However, he is still unconscious at the hospital, and I have no time to lose. I will write my questions on a piece of paper. When he is able to answer, get a courier through to me at Paruana. I'm leaving for there at once."

Hammersly stared at him, and in the older man's eyes there shone something like regret—regret for his lost youth, for the days when he, too, had gone forth to meet adventure. He sighed.

"Very well," he said. "I suppose there is little use trying to dissuade you by remarking the peril in going out there alone. However, if there's trouble, real trouble, that you think endangers British control, contrive to get a message through to me. I'll send you troops if I have to break every rule in K. R. to do it."

VAN shook his hand warmly, and hastily scribbled on a piece of paper the things that he desired to learn from the stricken Rajah. As he handed the paper to Hammersly, the latter suddenly struck his thigh with the palm of his hand in the manner of a man struck with an idea.

"There's one strange thing," he said. "How on earth is the gang going to get to Paruana?"

Van shrugged. "Train," he suggested. "Trek, perhaps."

Hammersly shook his head.

"No," he said. "No one can trek through that jungle, not even the natives. And surely he wouldn't dare take a train. There are so many of his men. He would be afraid of arousing suspicion."

Van shrugged again.

"Well, I don't know," he said. "But I'm sure that's where he's headed in any event. I'm taking the Paruana train myself tonight."

He shook hands again with the Major, then moved silently into the shadows near the door. The door opened, then closed and the Phantom was gone, as swiftly, as silently, as unexpectedly as he had come.

CHAPTER XXII

Jungle Journey

THE steel wheels of the train clicked on the iron rails. Within the cars the heat was oppressive, as the headlight of the engine cut through the opaque darkness of the Indian night.

Seated alone in a compartment, Dick Van Loan smoked quietly and meditated. Though he wore no facial disguise, his mode of dress and manner branded him as a casual tourist of the wealthy class who had tired of Cook's beaten paths and was seeking more exotic spheres of travel.

He was well aware of the danger in which the speeding train was fast carrying him; aware that that danger was greatly increased because of his lack of knowledge as to exactly what form it would take. He

was certain that despite what Hammersly had told him about the difficulty of reaching Paruana, that was where the hooded man and his cohorts were headed.

The most puzzling thing was the mysterious object which they had compelled the helpless Rajah to reveal for them. It seemed from the conversation he had heard at the time, that in some inexplicable way this object was connected with the stolen jewels.

And since leaving the Major, he had unearthed another fact which puzzled him. Upon investigation he had discovered the name of the syndicate who had been refused the Paruana concessions. It was a firm above reproach. In fact, one of its directors, back in America, was known to him personally, and it seemed impossible that he could be in any way involved.

No, he realized that without some explanation from the Rajah, or a break in luck which would deliver the enemy into his hands, there was nothing he could do save thrust his head into jeopardy, seeking in some way to bring the hooded fiend to justice.

He sighed heavily, put out his cigarette and leaned back in his seat, drowsing lazily in the heat of the night. The train continued onward through the jungle. One fact, however, gave Van a sense of security. He knew that in the van a platoon of British soldiers had been assigned, as was the custom, to this and other trains that ran up to the border where law and order are not recognized with Occidental strictness.

HE dropped off into the netherland between sleep and complete wakefulness, the clicking of the wheels lulling his brain into a weary coma.

His drowsing was suddenly broken. His subconsciousness had realized the intrusion of an alien sound. Through that monotonous clicking there had come another noise. A sharp staccato crack, that was swallowed up almost immediately by the train's roar.

Yet to his mind, lulled, accustomed to the steady pounding of the train, it had been disturbing. He smiled as he analyzed the cause of this sudden wakefulness, and settled himself back on the seat again. Then he heard it again. And again!

THE train's whistle shrieked out into the night, ripping through the tranquillity of the jungle air. The air brakes hissed. Steel grated on steel.

Van lurched forward violently as the train came to an abrupt stop. And now that the clicking of the wheels had ceased, the staccato crackling became louder, faster—and recognizable.

Instinctively his hand fell to his coat pocket. His revolver was in his fingers as he raised the shade and peered through the window into the night. The darkness was shattered by a hundred stabbing flashes. Glass tinkled and fell beneath the crushing onslaught of a hundred rounds of ammunition.

Then, from the caboose, Van heard the weak crackle of a dozen rifles as the platoon of soldiers recovered from the surprise of this unprecedented attack and hurled lead at their unseen foe.

But it was futile, hopeless.

It was impossible to look into that jungle growth and count the foe, but their fire, the rattling of a score of machine-guns, the myriad of scarlet flashes that ate into the darkness indicated that this mysterious enemy had massed great numbers.

For a single instant, in a clearing in the jungle, Van saw a lone figure silhouetted against the waning moon. In his hands was a long object and a tripod. Hastily he began to set up his machine-gun and spray the train with death.

Van's revolver came up in an instant. His finger touched the trigger once, and the dark figure in the distance fell prone over his own unfired weapon.

Shouts of alarm and terror deluged the night. Van could hear the imploring accents of the English sergeant as he pleaded with his men to stand and face this terrible unseen foe. Then, after a short burst of machine-gun bullets, the sergeant's voice was still.

Van flung open the door of the compartment and leaped lightly to the ground. Half a dozen bodies lay there in the darkness, their life's blood ebbing away at the side of the tracks, victims to the wanton killer who still concealed himself in the darkness.

INSIDE the train most of the passengers huddled panic stricken in their compartments, prayers on their lips, and fear in their hearts.

Van raced alongside the train to the engine. A plan had come to him. Battle against these overwhelming odds was impossible, but there remained flight. By the locomotive he saw that this, too, was out of the question. Across the tracks lay half a dozen huge trees that would take many men to move.

His foot struck something soft and yielding. He glanced down to see the body of the engineer, riddled with bullets. His overalls were crimson with blood. Then, as he stood there, contemplating the terrible scene in horror, he heard a voice from the jungle.

It was a voice he had heard before. A voice pregnant with death and terror, a voice that answered the question of how the hooded maniac and his men were traveling to Paruana. For it was the voice of the masked fiend himself!

"Those of you who still live," it said, "shall not be harmed. You will leave the train at once with your belongings. If anyone attempts to resist us he shall die. Now come forth."

A CLICK sounded somewhere, and three searchlights burst into sudden light. The long line of cars was flooded with a brilliant yellow halo which revealed the gory scene in all its horror.

The moment the lights flicked on Van threw himself into the cab of the engine to avoid their revelatory glare. Now from the cars poured the passengers, dragging their belongings after them, bewildered, afraid, at this menace that had come upon them from the darkness of the jungle.

Van huddled in the cab. Beside him was the body of the fireman, dead with a bullet through his temple. Well, Van reflected bitterly, so this was the manner in which the fiend was travelling to Paruana. He was confiscating a train to take him. He resolved that if this train was to bear the forces of the hooded man to Paruana, it must also bear him, the Phantom.

A sudden idea struck him. Thus far none of the army from the jungle had approached the engine. They had their hands full with the passengers. Van waited no longer. Swiftly he stripped the clothes from his body, and exchanged them for the overalls of the dead fireman. Then gently he lowered the corpse from the train.

He smudged his face with coal dust, though there was little pos-

sibility of his being recognized in the blackness of the night. No sooner had he completed his change of habiliments, than a robed figure swung itself into the cab. A gun was pointed at him, and two eyes glared through a white hood.

That voice which he had learned to hate spoke.

"Can you drive this train?"

Van nodded. The hooded man turned and signalled one of his men. In answer to his summons a brawny Ghurka clambered into the cab. "Keep your gun against this man's head," said the hood in the dialect of the hills, "and see that he runs this train to Paruana."

The Ghurka grinned, snatched a shiny new revolver from the holster at his hip and proceeded to obey his master literally. The hooded man swung down from the engine and disappeared.

DOWN along the side of the train the passengers were left unharmed and the masked man's own private army proceeded to board with their baggage. As far as Van could understand, the plan was merely to leave the passengers where they were at the none too tender mercies of the jungle, until tomorrow's train came through.

Then a cold thought struck him. Would there be a train tomorrow? After all, these men were leaving little to chance. And if the Paruana express ran through tomorrow night, the authorities would be bound to discover what had happened. And then, again, would the hooded fiend permit the passengers to live. Their knowledge of what he had done would undoubtedly bring troops to investigate. The question was answered for him shortly.

A loud voice cried out in the Ghurka dialect.

"All right."

The brown man behind him shoved his weapon against Van's skull and indicated in pantomime that he should proceed. With a sigh, Van reached out and tentatively opened the throttle. There was a hiss of escaping steam. The wheels rotated slowly and the Paruana Express took up its interrupted journey.

THEN of a sudden, after she had picked up speed, there came a deafening crash from the rear; an explosion of such terrific force that the very air vibrated from it. Van thrust his head from the window of the cab and stared into the darkness behind. Flame and debris flew high in the air as if vomited from some mighty catapult, and the reverberations of a mighty explosion rocked the trees of the jungle.

Van's lips set grimly and his eyes narrowed. So that was it. Apparently well aware that the jungle formed an impregnable barrier to the province, they had blown the railroad tracks to pieces with such tremendous force that it would take a week to dig through again.

The Ghurka's white teeth showed in the darkness behind him, and the man's gun was still held unwaveringly at Van's head. Not that there was any need for the latter precaution at that moment. Van had no idea of attempting to escape. On the contrary, his destination was as firmly fixed in his mind as was that of the passengers he carried.

His eyes were narrowed and resolute. The muscles of his face were hard and determined. His mouth was a thin red line; as through the darkness sped the Paruana Express with Hell's own horde for passengers—Hell's own horde, who little knew or even dreamed that the Phantom was at the throttle!

CHAPTER XXIII

VAULT 13

THROUGH the ebon night the roaring train made its way, leaving far behind it the shattered tracks that would prevent pursuit, leaving the riddled bodies of those who had been victims of the devastating fire of the evil genius who had slain so wantonly for his own purposes.

Van, one hand on the throttle, peered into the night ahead, watching the piercing gleam from the engine's headlights thrust themselves into the blackness. By now he estimated that he was almost at their destination.

Paruana must be within ten miles. In a few minutes now, he realized he must confront another crisis. What would the hooded man do with the engineer after he had used him for his purpose? He was soon to find the answer to that question.

The Ghurka apparently had his orders. He jammed the muzzle of his weapon hard into Van's ribs.

"You will stop here," he said, in his own tongue.

Obediently Van closed the throttle slowly.

The hiss of escaping steam sounded through the night. The wheels grated on the tracks as the air brakes locked them. The Paruana Express, after the most exciting run in its history, slid to a stop on the smooth iron tracks.

Back in the cars the hooded man's army functioned with brisk military dispatch. The men detrained swiftly.

Van could hear voices as their officers shouted their orders.

He remained standing at the throttle, the gun still threatening him, waiting to see what turn developments would take, delaying formulating any plan of his own until he saw what the Fates had in store for him.

He was not long left in doubt. The familiar black robed figure appeared from nowhere and suddenly stood at the side of the cab. He looked up at the Ghurka. Van stood in the shadows of the cab to keep his face concealed in the darkness.

"You will rejoin the men at the Palace," he said. "It's a short half mile along the tracks from here."

The Ghurka bowed. Then looked at Van.

"And this sahib," he asked softly. "What shall I do with him?"

Even in that dull light, Van saw those brittle eyes behind the mask light up with a sinister light.

"Kill him," said the cruel voice. "We have neither time nor supplies for prisoners. Kill him, then rejoin the others."

A faint swish was heard as the robed figure turned on his heel and strode back to his men. The Ghurka turned to Van, an evil, tooth-revealing grin on his black face. His hand was firm on the butt of his revolver.

Once again the Phantom was face to face with death.

With a sudden twisting motion he threw his body to one side even as the Ghurka pressed the trigger of the pistol. The steel slug ripped through his overalls, scratching the skin, then it clanged harmlessly into the steel of the locomotive.

HIS left hand pounced like a striking rattler and gripped the brown wrist of the Ghurka. His right swung in a hard, short arc, and caught the Indian on the side of the jaw. Silently, quietly, the man staggered backwards, falling at the edge of the coal tender.

Van took the weapon from his inert nerveless fingers and slipped it into his own pocket. For a sec-

ond he stood there reviewing the situation, deciding upon his next move.

It occurred to him that perhaps the simplest thing, the most effective procedure, was to disguise himself as the Ghurka. With that in mind, he stooped down swiftly and drew from his pocket his make-up outfit.

But then, even before he had extracted the greasepaint from its water-proof case he heard approaching footsteps. There was no time now for disguise. The steps came nearer. There was time for nothing save escape; and very little time for that.

He swung down from the far side of the cab just as the black robed figure accompanied by Conners came up on the other side. They peered into the cab, and perceived the fallen Ghurka.

Van ran like a madman across a small clearing toward the safety of the jungle. He heard the hooded man utter a black oath. Two staccato revolver shots whizzed over his head into the dense foliage before him. A shouted command sounded from the train. The men threw their rifles up to their shoulders.

VAN, panting and spent, literally hurled himself into the underbrush. A second later a crackling volley of rifle fire hurtled into the growth. Van, lying low in the brush, heard the ripping of twigs as the steel flew high and wide into the trees. Again he heard that voice of terror issue its orders to the men.

"The engineer's escaped. Get him. He's in there somewhere!"

The patter of running feet came to Van's ears. He pulled himself up and desperately fought his way through the impeding vegetation. The going was slow, hard. Yet it was almost impossible for the searching men to find anything in that dense growth, save by the sheerest luck.

As he struggled through the tentacles of the jungle the sound of the voices, of the footsteps behind him, grew fainter and fainter, then at last faded away altogether.

THEN, and only then, did he rest. His muscles ached and his lungs cried for air. Still he could not remain there long. He must somehow contrive to get to the palace to see if he could enter the vaults ere his foes took away the thing that seemed so precious, so necessary to them.

He smoked a cigarette as he rested, and, taking a small compass from his pocket, took his bearings. It seemed to him that from where he stood, the Palace of Paruana was due east. He ground the cigarette out with his heel, and taking a deep breath set out again in that direction.

The weapon he had taken from the Ghurka he held in his hand, ready for any emergency. The jungle was still and eerie, though he knew well enough that in that black silence there lurked perils that were as great as any the hooded man could offer.

Occasionally he heard the low growl of some beast of prey. Once he heard the slim slither of a snake gliding over his path; and once in the faint eerie light of the waning moon he saw a giant python suspended from a tree, like a sinister coil of writhing rope.

Then through the trees in the distance he saw a pinpoint of light like a yellow star. It twinkled eerily. He quickened his pace toward it.

Suddenly the jungle ended, suddenly and precipitately, like the brick wall of a house. Van stood at its edge and stared ahead. There,

towering high and white in the night, were the majestic domes of the Rajah's Palace.

Hastily, but exercising even more caution than before, he made his way toward it.

After a short walk he approached a postern gate. Standing there was a turbaned man with a rifle. Silently, like some wraith who had crept from the mysterious jungle, Van approached. For a moment it appeared as if the guard would not see him.

HE clubbed his revolver, thinking to stun the man instantly, thus avoiding the alarm being given by him. He was less than three feet away, his weapon upraised, when suddenly the Indian turned, faced him and for a second stared with utter amazement at the overalled white man who confronted him.

That second of hesitation was enough.

Before the guard could even move his rifle, Van had sprung. As his body hurtled through the air, he lifted his revolver and swung it down hard. The butt cracked on the brown man's skull. His rifle fell from his fingers.

Van stepped over the prostrate form and gained the inner courtyard. He ran across the flagstones, up a short flight of steps that led to a low balcony there. Then, ignoring the doorway before him, he turned to a window some distance down the terrace.

With the aid of a knife he forced the catch, flung open the sash, and climbed through.

He found himself in an unlit empty room. Groping through the chamber, he let himself out into the hall. He explored this for some time before he found the steps which led to the underground vaults. Then he went below.

Thus far he had seen naught of the enemy, save for the guard outside. Whether or not the hooded man had proceeded at once to the vault, he did not know. Perhaps, secure in the knowledge that his treasure was at hand, he would wait until the morrow. In any event, that was the thing upon which Van counted, the thing for which he hoped.

Two flickering candles burned dismally below. Van crept along the flagstone floor, between the narrow walls of hewn granite, black with the grime of ages. On each side of him were huge stone doors which bore numbers. He calculated correctly that the Rajah must have indicated one of these when he had mentioned Vault 13.

And of a sudden, there it was.

Before him, at the foot of another flight of steps, was a stone portal bearing the numeral. For a moment he paused and listened. From some distant part of the house a low rumble as of men talking came to him.

There was no other sound.

FROM his pocket he withdrew a bunch of skeleton keys. One by one he fitted them into the old and rusted lock. It was some time before he selected one that would enter the lock. It took all his strength to turn it then.

He heard a tumbler fall and tugged mightily on the door. Slowly it swung open. His heart hammered excitedly. Here, perhaps, was the key to the mystery. Here was the strange item for which the hooded man had committed wholesale murder.

His finger touched the button on his flashlight. A white beam of light cut through the dimness and entered the vault. Then Van's pulse dropped back to normal, and his

face became a study in disappointment.

For the vault was empty!

CHAPTER XXIV

Treasure Tomb

ONCE again the blackness of the jungle closed about him. A mile or so over to the east lights still glowed in the Palace of Paruana. Apparently the hooded man and his adjutants were still in conference.

And no longer was the Phantom spying in their house.

When he had realized that the enemy had gained the vault before he had arrived, Van decided that he must get out of the house. Every minute he spent there increased the danger of his being captured.

True, he had no definite plan, no scheme with which to combat the machinations of the hooded man, but to remain in the palace would avail him nothing.

First he needed rest, rest to give him a clear head and an agile body when the call for action came. So he had decided to beat a strategic retreat back to the jungle, there to sleep until dawn.

At the present moment he sat high above the ground in the cradling branch of a huge tree. Though exposed there to the python and the apes, there was less danger at this altitude than on the treacherous floor of the jungle.

He leaned back against the tree trunk and sighed wearily. Apart from his fatigue, he was aware of a sensation of futility and despair. He realized the utter fiasco that this venture had developed into.

There, safe and apparently with the consummation of his plans merely a matter of time now, the hooded man and his cohorts sat in the Rajah's Palace, while outside, perched in a tree, impotent and outnumbered, was the Phantom.

Though he racked his brain, no vestige of an idea came to him. To enter the house single handed, with five rounds in his pistol, and essay a single-handed capture, was as ridiculous as it was foolhardy. Yet, outside that one mad idea, no plan occurred to him.

Then, of a sudden, his reverie was cut short. He sat bolt upright in his precarious resting place. From somewhere came the sound of voices —white men's voices.

He peered into the darkness until his eyes ached with the strain. And though he saw nothing, his ears now caught the crackle of brush as heavy feet descended upon it.

HE sat perfectly still and waited. A dark silhouette emerged from the brush, and stood for a moment in a small clearing some twenty feet away from the tree which Van was using as a hotel. A moment later a second silhouette joined the first one.

Now he could hear more clearly. A voice which he immediately recognized as that of Conners came to him.

"Here," said the crook. "We'll plant it here."

"Okay," said the lazy tones of Charters. "But for God's sake remember the spot."

"I'll remember it," said Conners. "Come on. Let's get to it. It'll be dawn soon and we've got to get back under cover of the darkness."

Charters made no reply. Instead, there came to Van's waiting eager ears the sound of a spade striking into the hard earth. In utter amazement he watched the pair of gangsters through the leafy screen which concealed him.

Each of them, armed with an ordinary shovel, was digging franti-

cally into the floor of the jungle as if his life depended upon it. At last, when they had achieved a hole some five feet deep, Conners straightened up and dropped his spade.

"That'll do," he announced. "Come on, drag the stuff over here."

Charters returned to the brush from whence they had come, and reappeared again, dragging a steel box through the grass. Van watched them keenly.

They dragged the box to the edge of the hole and tossed it in. Then, seizing their spades, they proceeded to fling back the earth that they had removed from the excavation.

HALF done in this latter task, they paused to rest briefly. Charters said: "If he ever finds out, he'll kill us."

"How's he going to find out?" demanded Conners. "Those phoney jewels are so perfect they'd fool old man Tiffany himself."

Something clicked in Van's brain at that moment. Conners' last words had furnished the clue to their strange behavior. Apparently, for the second time, they had stolen the jewels of Paruana. Stolen them this time from the hooded man who had purchased them from the white men. Stolen them and replaced them with the imitations, seeking out of the deal to reap a double profit.

Charters spoke again. "Say," he said, with the air of a man who had been struck with a sudden idea. "Did you actually figure on this when you insisted that we bring those phoney jewels in the submarine with us?"

Conners grunted. "I had no planned idea," he said, "but I thought perhaps an opportunity like this would present itself — as long as there were two sets of the jewels lying around."

Charters grinned.

"Well," he said, "it was a darn good idea. Come on, we'd better hurry."

They returned to their work in desperate haste. Then when the last clod had been returned to its place, they shouldered their spades and disappeared once more into the brush, leaving behind them, unseen and unobserved, the still figure of a man seated in a tree with more hope in his heart, more plans in his brain than he had had since his advent to the State of Paruana.

Now, armed with this information, Van was prepared to turn it to his own advantage. Conners had now double-crossed the hooded man. Evidently he had collected for the stealing of the jewels. Evidently, knowing that he was a veritable prisoner until the mysterious master mind's schemes had worked, he must have estimated that the deal was almost done now, that he would soon be released. Then he would take the jewels back to America and get rid of them for the second time at no mean profit to himself.

Conners' profit, Van reflected, had been great in this affair. And if the hooded man was prepared to pay literally millions for the American's service, his own rewards must be considerably greater.

FAR off on the eastern horizon the Indian sun pulled itself up from the Western hemisphere and deluged the earth with its blazing light—with its terrific heat.

And now that the night had fled —the night which had been replete with peril, Nature took her toll from Van's weary body. He never knew exactly at what point he fell into a deep and untroubled slumber. One moment he was wide awake, still pondering the thing he had just seen; the next, relaxed and leaning

against the trunk of the tree, he was fast asleep.

The hot sun was already falling down over the distant horizon when he awoke again.

And it was night once more when he bestirred himself and climbed down from his arboreous boudoir. As a precaution, he slipped on his black silk mask. He walked slowly toward the spot where he had seen the Rajah's jewels buried the preceding night.

As he stood there regarding the tomb of the treasure, his eyes narrowed and he became lost in thought. So much so that he failed to hear soft footsteps behind him, that he failed to see the two men who came forth out of the midst of the eerie jungle.

A VOICE with a clipped English accent said suddenly, "Put up your hands. Do not move."

He glanced upward swiftly. There, standing beneath the very tree he had just quitted, stood two men. One of them levelled an automatic at his head.

He was trapped. Just when he had been on the verge of returning to the battle. Just when he had a solid, tangible thing on which to work. He sighed bitterly, but raised his hands as the two figures came toward him.

Then again the voice spoke and in the tones this time was a gratified surprise.

"It is the Phantom!"

Van's heart lifted. Carefully he scrutinized the speaker, and his heart gave a bound. It was the Rajah of Paruana who was approaching him, another Hindu at his side. He lowered the gun and stretched forth his hand to Van.

After they had greeted each other warmly, Van gave vent to the astonishment which was in his mind.

"How did you get here?" he asked. "I understand, other than by train, it's impossible to find a route to Paruana."

The Rajah smiled. "There's a secret path through the jungle," he said. "Few of us know it. That was the way I came when Hammersly delivered your note to me. I came to give you the information you require in person, and also to help you overcome those swine."

By now Van's spirits had improved a great deal. Things were now beginning to break. With the Rajah himself here to explain a number of things, his task of outwitting the foe should be considerably easier.

"This," said the Rajah, "is Putra, a faithful servant. He, too, knows the secret trail through the jungle. That is how he escaped after the arrival of my enemies. Too, he overheard some of their conversation, which will help us a great deal."

"Good," said Van. "We need all the information we can get. And we need more than that. We need men to help us overcome them."

THE Rajah smiled quietly.

"We have them," he said.

Van raised his eyebrows.

"Men?" he repeated. "Where?"

"Encamped in the jungle some two miles back are a hundred troops. When I revealed the whole story to Hammersly, he ordered them out without hesitation. However, I did not want to charge down at once. I wanted to attempt a liaison with you first. Perhaps they have won the people to their side. If so, I did not want wholesale slaughter. We have agreed that a shot from a Very pistol shall be the signal which brings the troops to our side when we need them."

"Good," said Van. "But in the meantime will you kindly explain

to me what is the mysterious thing for which they search."

"I'll tell you everything," said the Rajah. "Now listen."

Van was silent. Standing there in the midst of the dark, impenetrable jungle, as the Rajah unfolded a story as strange, as weird as the environment in which they stood.

"Know you," he said, "that it is written on our holy books, that on one day of the new moon in the seventh month, Memmsah, the magnificent, the first Rajah of Paruana, shall rise from his grave and come to his people, counseling them. He will wear upon that occasion the jewels of Paruana, and the costly robe in which he was buried. They stole the jewels and forced me to reveal to them the location of the robe."

A PUZZLED frown marked Van's brow.

"Well," he said, "how does this clear things up?"

"Of course," explained the Rajah, I realize that it is all apocryphal. But still the people believe. These men intend to produce a false Memmsah who will appear to the people with the new moon. He will address them. He will tell them to depose me and permit young Akbar, my half-brother, to rule in my place."

Van's frown grew deeper.

"But if you knew this all the time," said Van, "you could have taken greater precautions to prevent it?"

"I did not know all of it," said the Rajah, "until I met Putra on the jungle trail. To the best of my knowledge, Akbar was still at school in England. Putra told me that they had kidnaped him, that he is in the Palace, ready to appear when the false Memmsah will miraculously produce him. In this way will he sway the people. Akbar will be their ruler, and he, a mere boy, shall be putty in the hands of my enemies. Of those who desire to exploit my people!"

And now that Van understood the plan in detail a swift idea illuminated his mind.

"What else did Putra find out?" he asked. "How do they intend to stage their little drama at the new moon?"

"The people will assemble," said the Rajah. "My step-brother Hari Singh has spread the rumor of Memmsah's reappearance. Before them on the palace courtyard will be the tomb of Memmsah. From it he will appear. Later, after he has harangued the crowd, he will promise them a miracle and will cause Akbar to emerge from the same tomb. Do you understand?"

"Very well," said Van. "And I have an idea to combat them. Listen. Can Putra return down the jungle trail and somewhere obtain a robe that is the counterpart of the one which Memmsah wears?"

The Rajah considered this for a moment.

"Perhaps," he said. "What is your idea?"

"This," said Van. "As you say we don't dare call the troops until we have won the people to our side. Very well, that is what I plan to do. Tomorrow at the new moon, most of their men will be outside to witness the miracle. Inside there will probably be no others, save the guards of Akbar.

I SHALL disguise myself as an Indian, then we three shall creep to the castle. We shall overpower those guards, and when Memmsah calls for his miracle, when he opens the tomb to find Akbar, Akbar shall not be there, but another shall."

"Who?" said the Rajah.

"The Phantom," said Van with a chuckle. "And he will swing the mob over again."

"It's a daring scheme," said the Rajah. "But suppose that Putra is successful in finding a counterpart of the old robe, what then? What of the jewels?"

Van grinned.

"That's easy," he said. "Fate herself attended to that matter just before you came along the secret trail."

CHAPTER XXV

A Prophecy

THE DAY of the new moon dawned bright and hot. A burning copper sun threw its intensity down upon an arid land. Miasmic steam rose from the jungle. In the distance the border hills reared their cool snow-tipped heads to heaven, as if seeking softer altitudes in which to breathe.

The courtyard of the Rajah's palace seethed with humanity. Since early morning when the ornate iron gates had been flung open, the tribes from far and near had been flocking to witness the miracle for which they had waited all these years. Now at last, it had been whispered, it was about to happen. The writings of the sacred book were about to come true. The dream of the priests and seers was about to become an actual thing.

The marble veranda which overlooked the courtyard was decked with purple banners. In its center stood the Rajah's golden throne, and at its side, against the rear wall, stood the old decaying tomb of the first Rajah of Paruana, Memmsah, the Magnificent.

Within the palace an excited hum ran through the native servants as the febrile nervousness of the mob outside permeated the walls and sent the Indians into a religious frenzy. Perhaps the coolest figure in the province that day was the man who sat in one of the Rajah's private rooms, and spoke to three white men and an Indian.

The man was seated on a gorgeous dais, whose finely wrought gold was inlaid with a thousand multicolored gems. He wore a long black robe and a white hood completely covered his face. Behind two slits cut in the hood a pair of cruel eyes gleamed triumphantly.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "our adventure is at about an end. After today we need have no fear. We shall control the province. As for you Americans, you shall return home tonight, laden with gold as a reward for faithfully serving me."

Charters winked broadly at his companions, but the hooded man did not seem to notice.

"And you, Hari Singh," he continued, "you shall be minister of the province."

The Indian bowed.

"But, sir," he said, "what of the British? Will they not dispossess us with troops when they know we have cast my step-brother from his throne?"

The man in the hood chuckled.

"NO," he said, "they will not. If the people are with us they will not dare risk an uprising. Further, the government has just declared for an autonomy of the peoples of India. If the people wish our rule, they must have it. And after the miracle that occurs at first sight of the new moon, they shall forget their former ruler."

Singh bowed, and his brown face became wreathed in a smile as the mysterious master mind of the nefarious scheme allayed his remaining fears.

"Now, tell me," said the white

hood again, "is the boy prepared? Is he with his guards and are they thoroughly sure of what they must do?"

"It is arranged, Sahib," said Hari Singh.

The white hood turned and fixed its eyes upon the three Americans. "Tonight you shall wear your uniforms for the last time. It must be an impressive ceremony. We must dominate that mob by sheer psychological force. See that all is made ready and gather upon the veranda as soon as the new moon shows itself. That is all."

THE men in the room bowed shortly and left. As soon as the door was closed the hooded figure dropped his air of casualness and hastily crossed the room. He locked the door, and removed the mask from his face. He wiped the perspiration from himself, then turned and regarded himself in the mirror.

His reflection smiled back at him.

"Well," he muttered softly to himself, "it was a hard job, but, thank God, tonight it's done and over with."

Then he threw himself down on a couch at the side of the room and closed his eyes. The night's task which still lay ahead of him was a hard one, he would need all his strength, all his daring courage to carry it through, so now he must rest.

And had he known what was in the Phantom's mind at that moment, his rest would not have been as tranquil, as easy, as it was.

The sky was unclouded when dusk came. The sun had sunk to rest over the western hills and now the night was purple and fragrant. A cool breeze swept the province, but made little headway in the crowded fetid courtyard of the Rajah of Paruana.

Suddenly an excited scream went up from the assembled natives. A hundred brown fingers pointed upward to the sky and a thousand voices shouted in unison: "The new moon! It comes! Oh, Memmsah, return to thy children!"

Then of a sudden, a hundred torches flamed to light in the courtyard throwing an eerie, unreal light upon the scene, lighting a thousand fanatical faces with their yellow beams. The mob was now at fever heat. Excitement pulsated through their hearts. They were exalted, fanatical—and dangerous.

The weight of a single hair could sway them now, sway them either way, transform them to a mighty fanatical force for good or evil. The man in the hood knew this well, and it was upon this fact that he had staked everything. The Phantom knew it, too, and he was about to fling his own life into the balance in order to wrest the victory from the bloody hands of his foes.

FROM somewhere at the side of the yard a drum beat with maddening monotony. Its dramatic rhythms stirred the pulses of the mob, stirred them until unconsciously they beat at the same rate as the pounding tom-toms. Somewhere a woman shrieked hoarsely. A baby whined in terror at the eeriness of it; and overhead like a silver symbol of evil, the new moon shed a soft light down upon the ghostly domes of the palace.

There was a sudden shuffling of feet on the veranda. Doors from the palace were flung open and many men appeared. The three Americans, resplendent in the military uniforms with which they had been provided, stood stiffly at attention near the rail. Hari Singh and half a dozen other high caste Hindus, clad in robes of state,

walked dignifiedly out into the open. A thousand throats shouted excitedly as Hari Singh detached himself from the others and came down to the front of the balcony. He raised his hand for silence. The shouting ceased but in that distant corner of the courtyard the drums still hammered out their monotonous, savage chant.

"My brothers," Hari Singh addressed them, "above you is the new moon, and as tonight it shines down upon Paruana, a new dynasty is born. One is raised from the grave and another is born. Tonight, what was once written by the prophets shall come to pass. He who was the first to rule us shall rise from the grave, shall break the bonds of Nirvana and return to us. Return to us in our travail and dictate to us how we shall henceforth live."

STACCATO, the booming of the drums punctuated his sentences. He continued:

"From the lips of Memmsah, the Magnificent, whom we all honor, we shall hear who must rule us in the future. As you know, my perfidious step-brother deserted us in our hour of need. For months he has been gone, spending the money we earn for him in the Western World.

"Some of you have said this is wrong. Some of you have said that no one should criticize a ruler. Very well, tonight we shall hear the end of this talking. We shall hear a decision from the lips of Memmsah himself. Look you!"

Hari Singh flung his hand to heaven, and for a moment it seemed as if the Deities themselves had taken a hand in the plans of the hooded man. For over the face of the new moon there passed a flimsy cloud.

"Look you," cried Singh again. "Is it not written: *And Memmsah the Magnificent shall return. He shall return with the new moon in the seventh season. For an instant the moon shall be obscured by nimbus, then as it shines clear and lucid once more, Memmsah, the Magnificent, shall arise from his grave and give counsel to his children.* Is it not written?"

Every eye in that courtyard was turned to heaven. The wisp of summer cloud, propelled by a vagrant breeze swept over the face of the moon, passed by, and left the queen of the night alone and luminous in the heavens. And a thousand voices cried as one: *"It is so written!"*

"Then," said Hari Singh, turning to the upright tomb, "if it is written, it is the truth. Oh, Memmsah, the Magnificent, come forth and counsel thy children!"

The drums picked up a beat.

CHAPTER XXVI

MIRACLE!

THE STONE door of the tomb moved. Slightly at first. Dust and decay crumbled from its side and fell to the marble floor. The sweating mob of natives quivered. Their hearts pounded and fed their brains with intoxicated blood.

Theatrically, another torch flared to life above the opening door. It groaned on its hinges, then swung wide. Within the tomb there was movement, slow movement. Something gorgeous gleamed in the flickering torchlight. Something magnificent glittered with a beauty that was almost painful to behold.

A man stepped from the tomb!

The mob was hushed. Held by a silence that made the very ear ache. The deathly voice of the drums

seemed somehow to contain a mighty song of exultation, of triumph.

A glittering resplendent figure moved in the eerie light. It was dressed in a long robe which encased its whole body from head to foot. Upon the robe there gleamed and sparkled gems that could be bought by no one man in the world.

ON its head was a mask, a rigid pale, expressionless mask, that reached up, covered the plate, and evolved finally to a crown beset with magnificent splendor. And on a gold chain which hung from the neck was suspended a thing of liquid iridescence which held the awful beauty of paradise imprisoned in a single prism—the flawless diamond of Paruana.

As one man the awed mob threw themselves to the ground. The drums hammered out their maddening song. A mighty voice rose, quivered.

"Memmsah! Memmsah, we salute thee!"

The glittering, almost apocryphal figure walked majestically to the edge of the balcony. He stretched forth a hand. His voice emerged from behind the mask which covered him.

"Arise, my children!"

Slowly the awed crowd rose and stared with fear and wonder in their eyes.

But within earshot, though unobserved, there was one man who felt no awe in his breast. For he had heard that voice before; and he knew it as a voice that presaged death. Yet the Phantom made no move. The time had not yet come for him to act.

The voice that a thousand religious fanatical believers in reincarnation were sure had reached out to them from Paradise; had returned to this earth to counsel his subjects, continued:

"My children, fear me not. I have not come to punish thee. Rather to free thee from the thrall of him who calls himself your Rajah."

A murmur ran through the crowd at these words. The discontent which had been rife in the province of late, crystallized now that this voice upheld it.

"You have been crushed with taxation," continued the bejeweled figure, "you have been burdened with much to support the irreligious desires of your ruler. You have with the sweat of your brow yielded up to him monies which have been spent in direct violation of the great Mohammed."

A rumble like distant thunder swept through the mob. The drums chanted of murder, and lust, and blood.

"Yet," continued the man from the tomb, "ye have made no resistance. Good men that ye be, ye have not struck down him who has exploited you. Ye have obeyed blindly for ye did not know who amongst you should be your next Rajah should the present one receive his just deserts."

The rumble in the yard grew louder, ominous. A voice cried: "It is true! Memmsah speaks truly!"

A HUNDRED throats took up the cry. The drums beat sultry, dry, and every stroke of the sticks was a muffled rifle shot. The tension in the air imparted itself to the white men on the balcony. Conners shuffled uneasily. Winton and Charters were pale, anxious. The flickering torch cast its light upon the diamond of Paruana, and that light was thrown back a thousandfold by the flawless facets. The stars were cold in the heavens as

death and evil rode side by side through the sable sky.

"So," said the voice, rising to a thundering crescendo, "your Rajah has deserted you. He plays with infidels. He spends your money on Western vice. He shall rule no more! I, Memmsah, decree it!"

A deep-throated growl ran through the yard. A high-pitched, hysterical tone cried out:

"Then who shall rule us, Oh, Memmsah? Who shall rule?"

AKBAR shall rule ye. Akbar with the body of a stripling, but the mind of a man. I shall counsel him from Paradise. Ye shall accept him as Rajah."

A tremendous shout went up from the assembled multitude. Then a still doubting spirit spoke.

"But, Oh, Mighty One, Akbar is in England attending the schools of the infidel. How can he rule us?"

The masked gleaming figure on the balcony raised his hand for silence. The shouting ceased. The voices died away. Only the drums, the hammering drums with the ziraleet of insanity, throbbed on.

"Naught is impossible to Memmsah. I shall bring him here. I shall bring him from mine own tomb. The laws that man knows cannot bind Memmsah. I shall perform a miracle before your very eyes. I shall bring him forth from mine own tomb to rule you. Behold!"

They gaped at him. The awe that they felt was suddenly evolved to a mighty exultation. Now before their very eyes they were to see the workings of the gods. They were to see time and space defied. They were to see Akbar, the stripling, transported through space, whisked from the Occident to Paruana. Their hearts stood still, as Memmsah stood before his tomb, bowed to the east and raised his arms to heaven.

"Oh, Allah," he said, "grant thy son this boon. Send to me the favored Akbar to help these luckless people; send him to me across the sea, across the land. To mine own tomb, that it may establish the bond between us. As I came from the grave from death, let him come from life."

He turned once again to the tense, immobile mob whose dilated, marveling eyes were like fragments of radium in a pit.

"Behold!" he cried again; and the staccato note of the drum was the exclamation point to the word.

THEY beheld. Again the door of the tomb moved as if some invisible hand was tugging it open. The man in the jeweled costume wore a smile beneath his mask. This was the moment he had depended on. His producing Akbar at this, the psychological moment, would have the desired effect. This would even swerve those loyal to the old regime. This was his master stroke!

Even those on the balcony, who realized full well that this was staged theatrics, were awed by the tremendous scene. Even the white men, prosaic and used to the business of killing, felt it. Conners licked his lips nervously. Hari Singh stood tense and still.

The dry crackle of the crumbling stone was heard as it dropped to the floor, so profound was the silence. The figure in the costly costume stood perfectly still, his arms remaining outstretched to heaven. The gaping mob dared not blink their eyes as they watched that stone portal slowly swing open to disclose their prophesied miracle to them.

And now it seemed the torches flared brighter. The drums beat

more savagely. Hearts pounded against brown breasts. Nails bit into palms. A low murmur swept the crowd and suddenly became a mighty roar, a vibrant, trumpeting roar, that had not been heard since the walls of Jericho fell to the ground.

And the door swung open!

CHAPTER XXVII

Exposure

AND the miracle that appeared to the people of Paruana was not as great a thing as the miracle which the man in the jeweled costume beheld. For a figure stepped from the coffin and slammed the stone door before him —and that figure in no wise resembled Akbar, he of the stripling's body and the sage's mind.

The body was six feet tall and weighed almost two hundred pounds. It was clothed in Occidental garb. On its face was a black silk mask; in each of its hands was a pistol, one a .38, the other a Very.

It was the Phantom!

Before the astonished assemblage could stir, could even draw breath, the Phantom thrust his left hand in the air and fired the Very pistol. The shell tore from its barrel and shot into the sky with a burst of flame that could be seen for miles.

The automatic was aimed unwaveringly at the begemmed crown which encircled the head of Memmsah, the Magnificent. The Phantom spoke quietly in English.

"If you move," he said between his clenched teeth, "or if any of your men make a move to touch me, you die. Now stand at my side while I talk."

On the balcony it seemed, everyone was far too stupefied to move. The white men were whiter than their racial characteristics had ever made them. The Indians were frankly amazed. They stared bewilderedly at the costumed figure of their leader for instructions. But it appeared that he, too, was completely dazed.

Van's automatic touched his chest and obediently he moved toward the edge of the balcony with the masked figure.

But now the mob below had recovered from their initial surprise. They were outraged, stupefied. They had been promised a miracle. True, they had had one. But this was not Akbar. This was a white man. A mad white man whose face was half black, who carried a weapon in his hand with which he fired balls of fire into the heavens.

Normally, this weird apparition who had appeared from the tomb of Memmsah would have struck fear into their hearts, but tonight, intoxicated by these drums, maddened by religious frenzy, their sense of sacrilege overcame all else.

A howl of wrath went up from the courtyard, half directed at Van, and half at the figure who had promised them a new Rajah and had given them this impostor. In the front row hands reached up and attempted to lay hold of those on the balcony. With the exception of the Phantom and the man at whose heart he held a gun, they moved back.

VAN raised his left hand for silence. The mob quieted somewhat. He cleared his throat. His heart was beating wildly, and his pulse hammered thirty points above normal. He had staked everything on his ability to sway this frenzied mob.

His Very pistol had already sent its message to the troops. If the shouting crowd was on his side, had been definitely turned against the hooded man by the time they ar-

rived all would be well. But if he failed to swing them, if their temper was hostile, if they still believed that the costumed figure was the incarnation of Memmsah, much blood would be shed that night. The authorities would fume and the chances were that this monumental scheme would succeed after all.

THE battle would be won in the next few minutes. Won, not with bullets but with words. He lifted his voice and spoke in their native tongue.

"My friends, you have been duped. But I have come to save you from disappointment. You have been promised a miracle. You have been promised the sight of the man who is to rule you. Very well, I, and I alone, can bring him to you."

For a moment they were silent. Undoubtedly they had been impressed by his words. After all, had not Memmsah promised them Akbar? Had he not failed?

A voice cried out: "But you are not Memmsah. Memmsah stands there at your side. He would not dupe his children."

The murmur began again. The drum lost a beat for the first time that night, it throbbed more slowly. Van took heart.

"Memmsah?" he repeated. "And do you believe that this is Memmsah? This man lies. He tricks you."

"He wears Memmsah's clothes!" they cried. "He wears the jewels of Memmsah. He wears Memmsah's robes. He wears the diamond of Paruana."

A rumbling chorus took up the cry.

"He wears the diamond of Paruana!"

Van shouted at the top of his voice in order to make himself heard above the mob.

"It is not the diamond of Paruana. That, too, is a trick. Look you!"

Swiftly he seized the glittering bauble that hung from the other's neck. Swiftly he raised the barrel of the .38. He brought it down hard on the jewel. Beneath the blow the paste crumbled in his hand; and the gorgeous irridescent gem was shattered in the palm of his hand.

The crowd gasped. The drum ceased its chant. Van pressed his advantage.

"Is this the diamond of Paruana that crumbles in my hand like the will of a woman? Is this Memmsah, the Magnificent, who comes to you arrayed in jewels that break in the palm? Is this, then, the hero of Paruana?"

For an instant there was silence. To Van standing there, staking all on this turn of the dice, that silence lasted an eternity. This was the critical moment. Now they were his, or—

HE dared not contemplate the alternative.

Then a hoarse voice cried out:

"Kill him! Kill the false Memmsah! We have been tricked!"

"Wait!" Van held up his hand. His heart beat triumphantly now. He had won them, yet he must keep them in control or they would tear these panic-stricken men on the balcony to pieces. Next to him he could hear the hoarse breathing of the man in the first Rajah's robes of state.

"Wait," he cried again. "You have been promised the sight of your true ruler. You shall have it."

He half turned his head, and looked at the upright coffin. The frightened, dilated eyes of the hooded man's followers stared at him, wondering if the next move

would be the swish of the Reaper's scythe.

"Come forth," cried Van.

FOR the third time that evening, the stone door opened, and now from its interior there stepped a figure that exactly resembled that of the false Memmsah. His robe was identical. His gems were identical save in place of the poor shattered thing that hung about the trickster's neck, was a flawless diamond of such beauty that men dream of.

"This is your Rajah," said Van. "Look."

The figure raised his hands and removed the rigid mask from his face, and the countenance of the genuine Rajah of Paruana gazed down upon his bewildered people.

"My brothers," he said, "it is I. I have returned to you in time to save you from those who would have tricked you."

Stunned quiet greeted his words. Things were happening far too fast for these simple people. At last, a wondering voice asked the question that was in their minds.

"But what of Memmsah? Where is he? Those are his garments."

Van again addressed the assembly. He had the answer all ready for this one.

"Oh, people," he said. "This *is* Memmsah. Your present ruler is the living incarnation of Memmsah. That is why he may wear his robes. This is the soul of Memmsah, living again in the body of your prince. Allah is great, and Mohammed is his prophet!"

It was done.

The great crowd faced the east and bowed.

"Allah is great," came the tremendous response, "and Mohammed is his prophet!"

But then the frenzy which had subsided in the mob burst forth again. The excitement of the evening was too much for their primitive souls. Their drugged emotions demanded something. And the most obvious action came to their minds first.

"Kill them!" shouted half a dozen. "Slay Hari Singh and the false prophets. Death to them all and their followers!"

A rumble like that of thunder on a sultry day rippled through the air. Van essayed to stem the tide of blood lust that had come upon them.

"Stop!" he cried. "I—"

But as well to try to harness the ocean as leash those burning emotions. The whole mob took up the cry.

"Death! Death to our betrayers!"

In vain the Rajah added his voice to Van's. The crowd like a sweeping torrent pressed up against the balcony. A dozen brown figures clambered up the balustrade. A hundred others found their way to the front rank, striving to be the first to lay hands on the infidels.

IN that frantic instant as he fought to save the lives of his enemies Van's attention was distracted for a moment from the figure at his side. And now, the hooded man made his move. His hand shot out and struck Van on the side of the face.

The Phantom reeled, lost his balance and tumbled over the railing into the hands of the milling mob below. Another blow sent the Rajah spinning ere he could defend himself. The false Memmsah turned to his men.

"In the palace," he yelled. "We can hold them off!"

There was a concerted rush for the door, the blood-thirsty mob hard at their heels. The luckless Winton

was the last man. The mob was almost upon him as the costumed figure reached the door. He gave no thought to risking his own neck to save that of his ally. No sooner had he passed the threshold than he slammed the portal into place. The bolts clicked into place. Winton stumbled on the balcony. His hands hammered futilely on the closed door. He screamed in terror as the mob came down.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Secret Passages

FOR a moment Van thought he was done for. Knocked sprawling into the fighting gang below, he was tossed about like a cork in a storm. True, he knew that they had no intention of wreaking their vengeance on him, nevertheless, with the mob in this temper, close contact was exceedingly dangerous. He realized that if he ever fell below to the courtyard, those trampling feet would crush the life out of him.

Desperately he fought for a hold on the railing. Twice his hands reached out, and twice as he was about to grip the rail, someone jerked him aside. Then a body beneath him surged forward, and now he clutched the balustrade.

Agilely he pulled himself up to the balcony. A fighting, shouting mob surrounded the fallen figure of Winton. His screams of agony ripped out horribly into the night. Struggling desperately, shouting against the cries of the natives was the Rajah, frantically attempting to save the white man from the vengeance of his people.

Van charged into the crowd, head down. He struck the outer fringe with all his strength, almost stunning himself, but he made an opening. Smashing out desperately with his fists, he made his way to Winton's side.

He yelled at the natives in their own tongue, but they paid him no heed. Finally, he succeeded in getting his back against the wall. His left hand dragged the bleeding Winton to his feet. His right thrust the automatic in the nearest native's heart.

"Stop," he said. "Leave him to the white man's justice. I shall kill the first man who disobeys me."

For a moment they hesitated. The sight of that cold steel against their comrade's heart had its sobering effect.

Then someone cried:

"Let him be. It is the false Memmsah that we want. Storm the house."

THEY pounded desperately on the panels of the door, as Van dripping with perspiration dragged Winton to the relative safety of the far corner of the courtyard. The Rajah followed.

By now a thousand men were attacking the palace at various points, essaying to force an entrance to slay the man who had duped them.

Van stared at the Rajah over Winton's gory form.

"If they ever get in," he said, "hell itself won't stop them. They'll rip that gang to pieces."

"The palace is strong," said the Rajah. "If they have made every door fast from within they should hold them off until the troops arrive. If not—"

He shrugged his shoulders and did not finish the sentence.

Van bent down and wiped the blood from Winton's face.

"Hurt badly?" he asked.

The man nodded weakly.

"I think I'm done for," he said. "That dirty yellow rat slammed the door in my face."

Then suddenly above the tumult of the invaders, there came a swift staccato crackle. It was reinforced by three more similar sounds. Screams of agony rent the air. Van turned an alarmed face to the Rajah.

"My God," he said, "they're using machine-guns in there. They'll slaughter them."

The machine-guns from within continued their devastating thread of fire. The brown attackers fell in winnows as the withering stream of lead ate its way into their bodies. Shrieks of fear and pain ascended to heaven in awful chorus.

Then the ranks of the Indians broke. Those of them who still were on their feet turned and ran for their lives into the friendly shadows of the jungle that hid them from the cruel marksmanship of the defenders. And as they went the machine-guns kept up their chatter, mowing down the dark fleeing figures wantonly, ruthlessly.

Then, as it appeared that those within the palace had won the day, when not a native remained near the building, a sudden answering hail of lead spattered up against the stone walls of the palace. Van and the Rajah exchanged significant, anxious glances.

"The troops," said Van. "And we're in a pretty spot between the two fires. We'll have to make our way out to meet them. Come on, I'll bring Winton."

HE stooped over the fallen man and lifted him up. Winton groaned weakly.

"Never mind me," he protested.

Van, however, disregarded him, and carefully they made their way through the courtyard, slinking in the shadows of the high walls.

From both before and behind them death whizzed through the air. Cautiously they crept through the night. A spent ricocheting piece of steel flicked Van's wrist and drew blood. His teeth sank into his lip but he made no sound.

Out of the yard they slunk, unobserved. The danger now lay from the bullets of the troops toward whom they were advancing. Half a dozen times they were compelled to take cover behind some friendly tree to avoid the barrage that was being laid down at the palace.

THEN at last an English voice came to their ears, crisp and staccato.

"Halt, or I fire."

Van breathed a sigh of relief as they stood their ground and an officer came toward them. He saluted swiftly.

"We are here, Rajah," he said. "And this, I take it, is the Phantom."

Van acknowledged the greeting and rapidly they told the officer of the turn events had taken. The man frowned.

"They can hold out there a long time," he said. "With those machine-guns in their possession they can easily keep us from rushing the place."

"Wait," said the Rajah. "I can take you to the palace through a secret entrance. We can enter without their knowledge and take them by surprise."

Van handed over Winton's bloody form to two of the soldiers, and a moment later the Rajah led the soldiers and Van through a narrow jungle path. He stopped suddenly before a dense mass of vernal foliage. He pushed aside the greenery, revealing a stone trap door that apparently opened into the earth itself.

With a tremendous tug, he pulled it open. A flight of stone steps ran down into darkness beneath the earth.

Van took a flashlight from his pocket and boldly stepped inside.

"All right," he said. "Come on."

"In single file," said the Rajah. "It's a narrow passage."

SLOWLY they trooped down the flagstone steps into a long underground cave, lined with huge blocks of granite. Van's torch cut a beam of light through the thick darkness and swiftly they made their way through the tunnel.

Then, after some few hundred yards, Van came upon another flight of steps, this time leading upward. He gazed at the Rajah inquiringly. The Indian, with a smile, touched a lever at the side of the wall. A door at the head of the stairs swung slowly open. A moment later they had emerged into a deserted corridor in the castle.

"The machine-gunners are at the windows," whispered the officer. "We can take them by surprise from the rear."

Hastily they assigned some of their numbers to each room in which they guessed there was a gun. The officer's whistle was to be the signal to charge in upon the surprised enemy.

Van, with two soldiers at his side, silently made his way toward the chamber to which he had been assigned. Reaching his destination, they stood quietly at the threshold of the room. Van leaned over and peered through the door jamb.

There, seated calmly smoking at the side of a Lewis gun, sat Conners and Charters. The latter was talking. "Well," he observed, "they seem to have scrammed and I'm not sorry. Even if my cut of this affair is over half a million, I'll be glad to get out of it."

"Me, too," said Conners. "It's the toughest racket I ever played; and with the Phantom back again, I'm still worried." Charters laughed.

"You don't have to worry now," he said. "We've beaten them off. We'll be well out of it in the morning."

"You forget," said Conners gravely, "that his nibs knows those jewels were phoney."

Charters' face blanched.

"God," he said. "But can he tie it on us?"

BUT what Conners' opinion was on that subject, Charters was never destined to know. For at that moment a shrill whistle sounded throughout the palace. Half a dozen doors flew open at once. Armed men catapulted into the stronghold of an amazed enemy.

The two white men took one look at the masked figure and the soldiers behind him, and their faces were suddenly ashen pale.

Then before anyone could speak, Conners responded to a sudden fury within him. His beady eyes fastened upon the countenance of the masked man, and a terrible wrath seized him.

"You've crossed me once too often," he screamed in swift anger.

He swung the machine-gun around on its tripod, its muzzle spitting lead as he did so. But that lethal barrel had not yet turned its nozzle on the doorway, when Van's forefinger pressed hard against the trigger of his revolver.

A single reverberation crashed through the room, sounding clearly above the rattle of the Lewis. Then the chatter of the machine-gun ceased. Conners fell across its black barrel, blood running crazily down his coat. He lifted his head and shot a final desperate, baleful look at the man he had sworn to kill. Then his head dropped.

Charters thrust his hands above his head with alacrity.

"I surrender," he said.

The soldiers advanced and made him prisoner, when Van suddenly heard a cry of alarm from the hall.

"Stop him, somebody! He's heading for the vaults."

It was the Rajah's voice. Van dashed out into the hall in time to see the fleeing figure still clad in the robe of Memmsah, the Magnificent, disappear down a stairway. Troops raced in swift pursuit.

Van rushed down the hall, and gained three yards by the expedient of leaping over the bannister. Down two flights of stairs he ran until he emerged in the basement of the Palace. Even as he arrived, a great iron door clanged into place at the far end of the stone passageway.

CHAPTER XXIX

Mystery Machine

BY NOW the others had come up. They stood behind Van on the steps, staring at the door. The officer spoke.

"What's he hope to gain by that? We'll break the door down."

"It'll take some time," said the Rajah. "That's solid iron."

Van raised his voice and spoke aloud to the man in the vault.

"Come out," he said grimly. "We're bound to get you. It's simply a matter of time."

A hoarse chuckle emanated from the vault.

"It's a matter of eternity," said the voice of the hooded man. "Now listen to me, all of you. This door is well barred. I have in my hand a bomb filled with two pounds of ammonal. I'll give you ten minutes to get out and give me clear passage. Otherwise, I'll set this bomb off, blowing you and myself to hell. You get ten minutes from now."

The attackers stared at each other in utter dismay. "Do you think he's bluffing?" asked the officer.

Van shook his head. He had had enough dealings with the fiend in the vault to know that he did not bluff. No, now that he realized the game was up, he had little more to lose by death. And if he was driven to that he was determined to take the others with him.

THE Rajah gazed at Van helplessly. "Well, what shall we do?"

Van did not answer. He stood there, his brow wrinkled in thought and a bitter sense of disappointment gnawing at his breast.

He was on the point of counseling a strategic retreat and discussing the matter, when a weak voice called from the head of the stairs. Van looked up.

The fast fading body of Winton lay there where it had been put by the soldiers. Now he beckoned with a weak finger to Van. The latter raced up the stairs to the dying man's side. He was forced to bend his ear close to Winton's lips, so faint was the voice.

"Listen," said Winton. "It's pretty late to make amends. But you tried your best to save my life, while that rat in there tried to kill me. You can get him out of there."

Van's eyes lit up eagerly.

"How?"

"The machine. It's in one of the rooms at the top of the palace. The machine will open it before he knows it. Then you can jump him before he gets a chance to throw his bomb."

Machine? The word clicked in Van's consciousness. Immediately he thought of those gaping doors that Conners had ripped open with such consummate ease. Hastily he summoned the soldiers and sent them to the upper rooms to find the mysterious device.

With one eye glued to his wrist watch, he anxiously awaited their

return. Six of the ten minutes had passed when they appeared again, bearing between them a strange bulky box-like contrivance. On its face was a deep indentation.

Van turned to Winton.

"How does it work?" he whispered.

The dying man leaned up on his elbow, and spoke with effort.

"Set it up so that indentation faces the door. Press that button by the batteries, then pull the lever on the side back. The door will tear its bolts out because of the terrific magnetism contained in the machine. Stand close by the door and jump him as soon as it opens."

A horrible rattle emanated from his throat, and he fell back, prone and inert, accomplishing in death a far, far better thing than he had ever done in a misspent life.

Quietly, with the aid of the soldiers, Van set the machine up as directed. No sooner had they arranged it in position than once again the voice sounded from the vault. "So you remain there? You think I am bluffing? In two more minutes you shall find out."

Van made no answer. Instructing the officer to stand by and press the lever, he took up his position at the side of the door. He nodded his head in signal. The officer jammed down the small metal bar that protruded from the device.

THERE was a sudden whirring sound. A faint aura revolved within the machine and an almost imperceptible ray emanated from its centre. The iron door jerked slightly, then with a sharp report it smashed its own locks and swung wide open.

Within the vault, still arrayed in the historic garments of Memmsah, the Magnificent, stood the hooded man. In his hands was a black metal object. For a fraction of a second he was too astounded to move, and Van sprang upon him.

But even as his arch enemy, the Phantom, leaped, the other touched a spring on the metal object with his finger. The catch released, the striker plunged down and ignited the fuse of his deadly bomb.

Then Van was upon him. For a single desperate moment they struggled, while death himself leaned over them and watched the tide of battle. In his ears Van could hear the soft, sinister sizzle of the fuse.

With a frantic grab, he stretched forth his hand and snatched the bomb from the other's grasp. Hastily he looked up. At the top of the wall was a small barred window. The distance between those bars was just enough to permit the passage of the bomb. Praying that his aim would be accurate, Van hurled the object at the glass with all his strength.

THE glass shattered as the bomb went through. He seized the costumed man by the robe and dragged him from the vault.

"Quick," he cried to the others. "Get up the stairs. That bomb'll blow half the wall in on us."

And this time the hooded man came with him willingly enough.

They had no sooner reached the top of the stairs when a tremendous explosion rent the air. The palace quivered from the mighty shock. Below the wall of the vault trembled, then fell inwards with a terrific detonation. The magnetized machine that opened safes like paper was crushed by falling débris.

The air was filled with particles of stone and the dust of the ages that had been blown from its resting place within the walls. Then of a sudden, as they stood there staring silently at the damage, the

man who had caused this explosion abruptly came to life once more.

With a swift gesture, he leaned down and snatched the British officer's revolver from its holster. Then he turned on Van.

"Dog," he cried. "No matter what is done to me, you shall die first"

He levelled the revolver at Van's head and his finger constricted on the trigger. But when the round of ammunition left the barrel, Van's head was no longer there.

As soon as the other finished speaking, he threw his body to one side. His head dropped a full three feet as he did, and his own .38 leaped into his hand. The bullet buried itself harmlessly in the wall beyond.

Behind the mask was heard a muffled curse, and the officer's revolver swung around for a second shot, but too late. Even as the robed figure pivoted around, Van's own weapon spoke. Once, twice!

THE robed figure stumbled. The weapon dropped from inert fingers and fell with a clatter upon the floor. Blood streamed from two holes in the historic robe that he wore. His knees buckled beneath him. Then with a weird moan, he fell.

His head struck the top step, and his body, a limp, uncontrolled thing, rolled down the stairs. His mask caught on a piece of iron which had been shattered by the explosion, and was ripped from his face.

The officer gripped Van's arm.

"Good God," he said. "A white man!"

Van nodded. A grim smile played about his mouth.

"Yes," he said quietly. "His name is Champion. He's quite a respectable citizen in the States."

The Rajah turned to him, an expression of surprise on his face.

"You knew who it was, then?"

"I rather guessed," admi ted Van. "When I saw that he was a big holder in the syndicate that tried to force those concessions from you. But it's all over now, though at a cost of more blood than I care to remember."

"Yes," said the Rajah happily. "It's all over now. And once more we can resume our normal lives and be happy."

"Amen to that," said the officer.

BUT the man whom the world knew as the Phantom said nothing. If it were over for him, it was to begin again very shortly. For his happiness was not derived from the peace and tranquility that brings solace to the souls of most men. No, to him, adventure was meat and drink. It supplied the zest of life.

And he knew that somewhere, sometime, there would be another George Champion, another evil genius who would put his courage and wits to the test.

And then another and another; and there would be no peace for the Phantom. For peace and tranquility he had eschewed when he had assumed his role. No, let others be grateful for ease and surcease; as for him, he was ready and eager to greet a new foe, now that his last adversary had been overcome.

NEXT MONTH:

THIRTEEN CARDS OF DEATH

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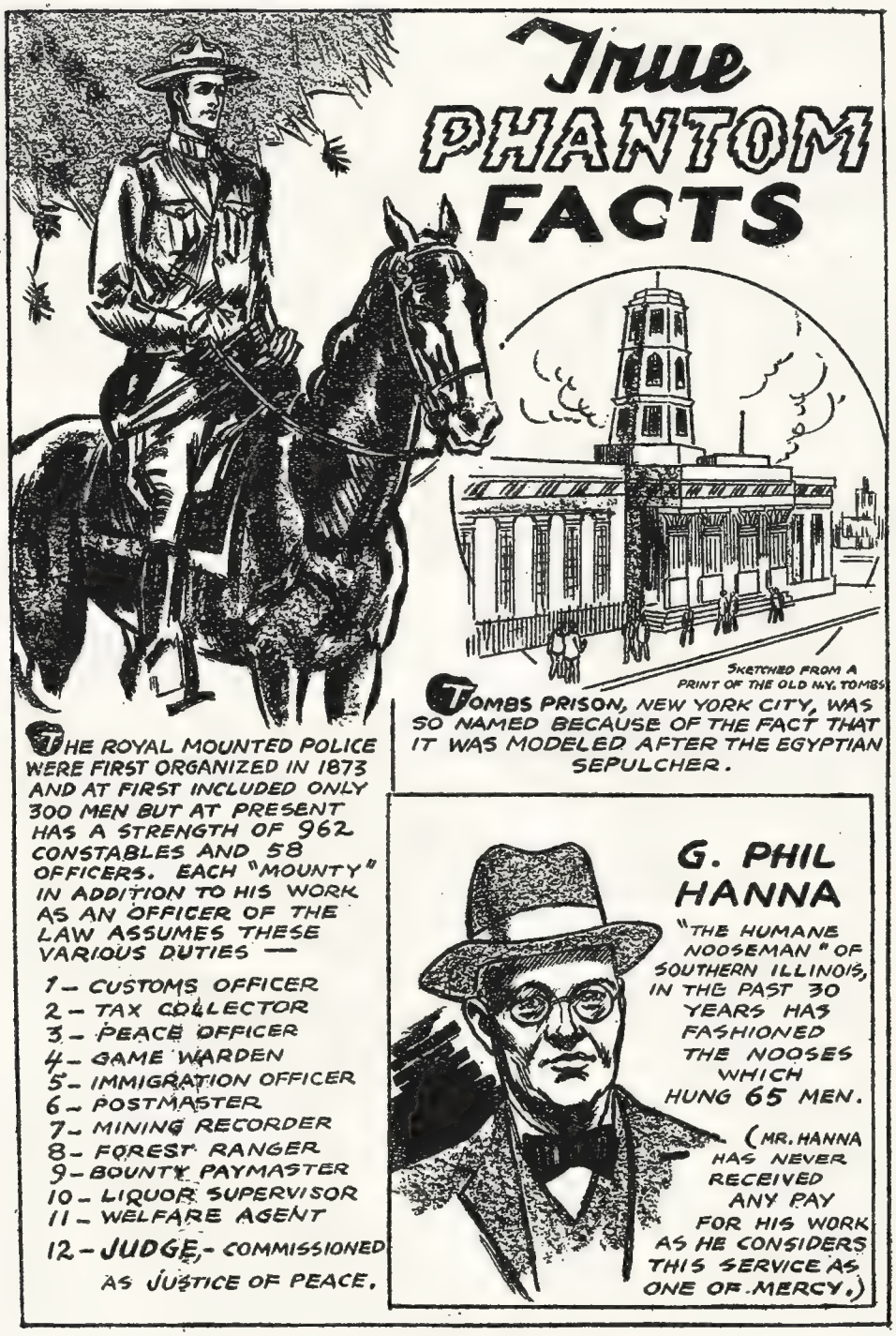
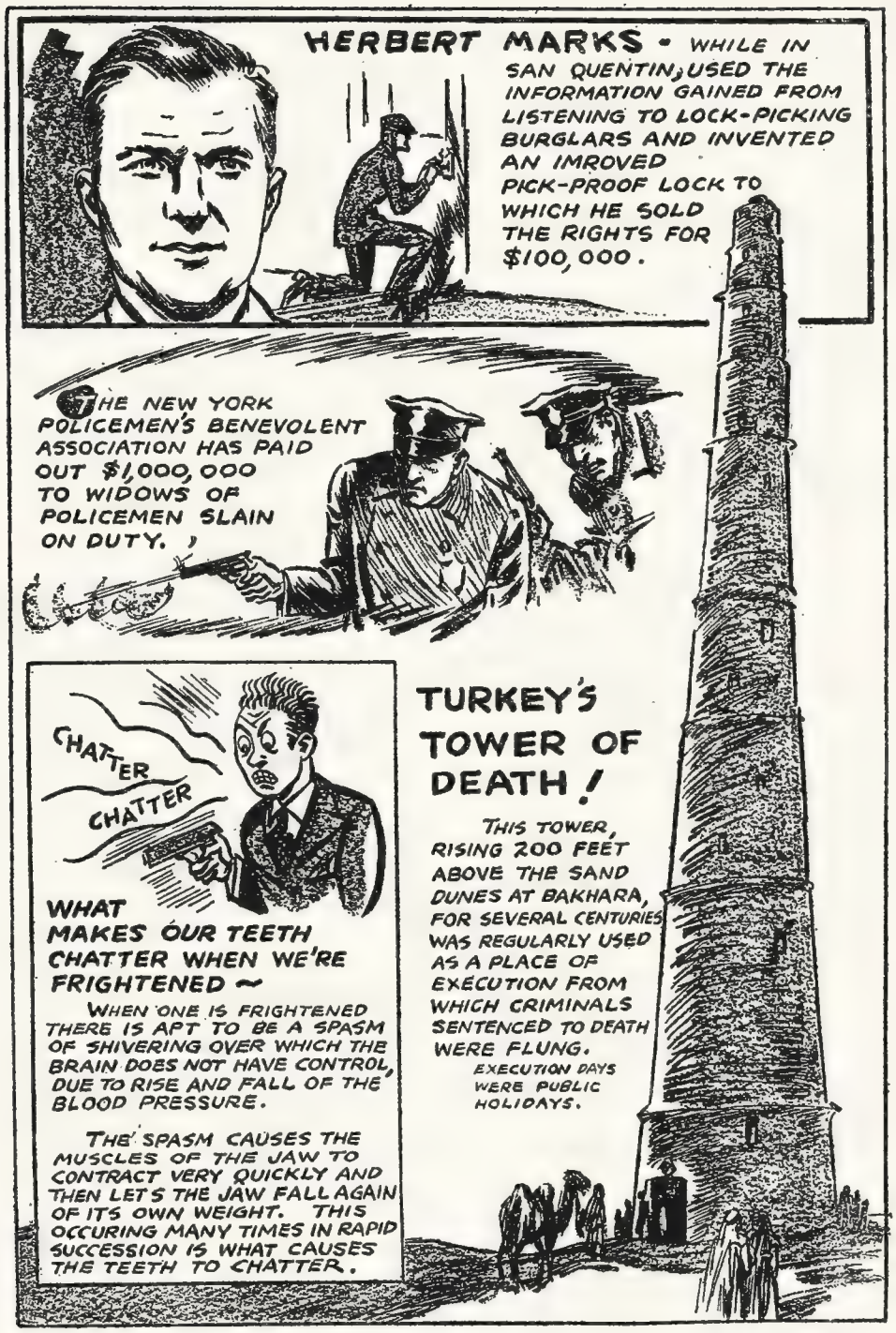

True
PHANTOM
FACTS
THE ROYAL MOUNTED POLICE WERE FIRST ORGANIZED IN 1873 AND AT FIRST INCLUDED ONLY 300 MEN BUT AT PRESENT HAS A STRENGTH OF 962 CONSTABLES AND 58 OFFICERS. EACH "MOUNTY" IN ADDITION TO HIS WORK AS AN OFFICER OF THE LAW ASSUMES THESE VARIOUS DUTIES —
1 – CUSTOMS OFFICER
2 – TAX COLLECTOR
3 – PEACE OFFICER
4 – GAME WARDEN
5 – IMMIGRATION OFFICER
6 – POSTMASTER
7 – MINING RECORDER
8 – FOREST RANGER
9 – BOUNTY PAYMASTER
10 – LIQUOR SUPERVISOR
11 – WELFARE AGENT
12 – JUDGE, – COMMISSIONED AS JUSTICE OF PEACE.
SKETCHED FROM A PRINT OF THE OLD N.Y. TOMBS
TOMBS PRISON, NEW YORK CITY, WAS SO NAMED BECAUSE OF THE FACT THAT IT WAS MODELED AFTER THE EGYPTIAN SEPULCHER.
G. PHIL HANNA
"THE HUMANE NOOSEMAN" OF SOUTHERN ILLINOIS, IN THE PAST 30 YEARS HAS FASHIONED THE NOOSES WHICH HUNG 65 MEN.
(MR. HANNA HAS NEVER RECEIVED ANY PAY FOR HIS WORK AS HE CONSIDERS THIS SERVICE AS ONE OF MERCY.)

"True Phantom Facts" is an Exclusive Regular


HERBERT MARKS - WHILE IN SAN QUENTIN, USED THE INFORMATION GAINED FROM LISTENING TO LOCK-PICKING BURGLARS AND INVENTED AN IMROVED PICK-PROOF LOCK TO WHICH HE SOLD THE RIGHTS FOR $100,000.
THE NEW YORK POLICEMEN'S BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION HAS PAID OUT $1,000,000 TO WIDOWS OF POLICEMEN SLAIN ON DUTY.
CHATTER CHATTER
WHAT MAKES OUR TEETH CHATTER WHEN WE'RE FRIGHTENED ~
WHEN ONE IS FRIGHTENED THERE IS APT TO BE A SPASM OF SHIVERING OVER WHICH THE BRAIN DOES NOT HAVE CONTROL, DUE TO RISE AND FALL OF THE BLOOD PRESSURE.
THE SPASM CAUSES THE MUSCLES OF THE JAW TO CONTRACT VERY QUICKLY AND THEN LETS THE JAW FALL AGAIN OF ITS OWN WEIGHT. THIS OCCURING MANY TIMES IN RAPID SUCCESSION IS WHAT CAUSES THE TEETH TO CHATTER.
TURKEY'S TOWER OF DEATH!
THIS TOWER, RISING 200 FEET ABOVE THE SAND DUNES AT BAKHARA, FOR SEVERAL CENTURIES WAS REGULARLY USED AS A PLACE OF EXECUTION FROM WHICH CRIMINALS SENTENCED TO DEATH WERE FLUNG.
EXECUTION DAYS WERE PUBLIC HOLIDAYS.

Monthly Feature of The Phantom Detective

BEHIND *the* NEWS

The Goods Were on Markey for the Death of Welch— But the Inside Story of the Case Will Astonish You

By ANATOLE FELDMAN

Author of "Cop Killers," "Ace of Death," etc.

EDDIE BARNES, city editor of the *Argus,* dashed into the reporters' room, a streaming cloud of pipe tobacco smoke marking his rapid progress. He literally pounced on me, flung me toward the door.

"Royal Hotel. Room 521—Dead man!" he barked. "Get going, Steve. It looks like the best story that has broken in months!"

I got going. Ten minutes later, after stewing at the delays of crosstown traffic, my cab skidded to a halt before the resplendent marquee of the Royal. The news had already leaked out and I had to use my elbows and flash my card to half a dozen bluecoats before I managed to fight my way into the lobby.

I made straight for the elevators, alighted on the fifth floor and hotfooted it down the carpeted corridor toward Room 521.

Inspector MacGrath of the Homicide Squad was already there, plus a couple of plainclothes men. But it was obvious from the baffled look on their faces that they hadn't

flicked the surface of the mystery of the death of the man with the black and swollen face who lay twisted into a grotesque huddle upon the bed.

MacGrath, with the secret hope of getting some streak of inspiration from one of the newspaper boys, gave us the story. The dead man had registered as Ralph C. Welch, of Washington, D. C. He had gone to his room alone at ten o'clock that morning. Two hours later—at five minutes past twelve—the telephone bell down at the desk had rung violently, and to the clerk who had answered it had come this weird message:

"A man in Room 521 is dying. Come at once."

The clerk, the hotel physician and the house detective had hurried to the room to find the man, Welch, dead upon the bed and the room showing every evidence of a violent struggle. The body was warm and it was apparent that he had died but a few minutes before.

"The motive probably was robbery," said MacGrath.

I DIDN'T say anything, but looked at Roy Narrow out of the corner of my eye. Narrow was the cream of the police crop, especially attached to the D. A.'s office. He had arrived on the scene a moment after myself, and though he hadn't offered any theory as yet, I knew from the quizzical smile on his lips, at MacGrath's remark, that he had his own theories.

I had visions of headlines and a feature story. I started for the door, when Narrow beckoned to me and nodded to the phone.

"Get your story in on that," he said with a jerk of his head. "Then stick around; something might break."

"Sure; swell," I grinned.

I got Eddie Barnes on the wire and gave him the few facts and details I had, then turned back to Narrow.

He lounged casually around the room, stooping now and then to pick some trifle off the floor. Finally he approached the bed. With great precision and care he examined the dead face.

FROM a drop light he detached the electric bulb, with its wire, and, turning on the light, he peered into the wide-open mouth of the dead man. He thrust a finger into the mouth and delicately pressed the tongue aside.

Apparently satisfied with this procedure, he next devoted his attention to the unmistakable signs of fingerprints around the swollen throat.

From the bureau and the floor, he removed several burned paper matches. Half a dozen brown cigarette stubs tossed into an ash tray received only a glance.

A half-burned cigar butt lay upon the bureau, and Narrow turned it slowly in his fingers, looking closely at the band which was still around it. He threw it back upon the bureau and turned over with the toe of his boot a bit of cardboard, torn from a package of paper matches.

Several chairs had been upset in the room and on the floor at the end of the bureau lay a shattered glass, fragments of which had been ground into the carpet, evidently trodden upon in the fight which had taken place in the room.

Narrow drew a small steel tape from his pocket and laid it along the carpet across the crushed glass. He sighed contentedly as he thrust the rule back into his pocket.

"We have enough here," he called to me. "Let's go."

I trailed after him, somewhat surprised at his words.

"If you've found anything here that indicates the killer, you're better than I believe you are," I spluttered. "And that's plenty."

I had unearthed no single clue on which to work, yet Narrow pretended that in less than five minutes he had picked up material enough to go to work on.

MACGRATH was still whispering to his men as we passed through and Narrow called out: "No other clues, eh, Mac?"

"Just one," reluctantly grumbled the inspector, passing over to Narrow a yellow slip of paper, folded several times and burned at one end.

Narrow opened it. It proved to be a bit of a telegraph blank and only the left edge of the message remained.

". . . row me . . . ." on one line and . . . "the lo . . . ." on the next under it, were all that remained of the message.

"We're checking up on Western Union," growled MacGrath. "We'll get a copy of the original and from the clerk who took it a description of the sender."

Narrow smiled his sweetest smile. "Sorry, Mac, but you'll never find an original message," he purred.

"No?" snorted the other. "Why not?"

"Because that message never came over the wire. It was sent by *messenger*. If you'll look at that scrap of paper again you'll see that there's still part of the printed word *Send* on the form. A message over the wire is marked *Received.*" Before the nettled inspector had an opportunity to confirm this, Narrow continued: "Don't hunt for the man who received this message. Look for the boy who delivered it, and then find the clerk who sent him out. The clerk will undoubtedly give you an accurate description of the man who sent it—in great detail. It isn't often that a man six feet five inches tall wanders into a Broadway telegraph office, and clerks are always interested in men as big as that."

Leaving MacGrath sputtering in his wake, Narrow and I strode down the corridor.

As for Narrow he was evidently pleased with the complete state of mystification into which I had fallen over the projection of the very tall man in the affair.

"I'll pass up the giant," I told him. "I fail to follow you all along the line."

Narrow smiled. He flagged a cab and with one foot on the running board, turned back to me. "Meet me at Sardi's at seven. I might have some news for you then. And in the meantime, don't let MacGrath give you a bum steer."

Promptly and eagerly I arrived at Sardi's at seven that evening, only to meet with disappointment. Narrow was not there, but in his stead he had left a note for me. The manager handed it to me with a nod, and with swift fingers I ripped open the flap.

Steve:

Meet me lobby Hotel Pierce West 14th.

Narrow.

FIFTEEN minutes later I puffed breathlessly into the lobby of the Pierce Hotel. Reclining at ease in an over-stuffed Morris chair Narrow looked up at my hurried entrance. He smiled, waved his hand gayly at me and indicated the chair at his side.

"What's the idea?" I complained, as I flung myself into the seat beside him. "You invite me to dinner

at a good restaurant and then bring me down to 14th Street."

Narrow smiled, lit a cigarette and exhaled a heavy cloud of smoke. "What would you rather have?" he purred, "a dinner at Sardi's or be in at the finish?"

"You mean—?" I began breathlessly, half jumping out of my seat.

Narrow waved me back again with the tip of his cigarette. "Yes; just that. Our man's upstairs."

I jumped up again. "Let's go!"

Narrow shook his head. "Smoke our cigarette first and cool off."

I restrained my impatience with an effort, puffed nervously at a cigarette. Narrow, however, took the matter calmly.

However, at a sign from him a few moments later we drifted toward the elevator and rapidly ascended to the eighth floor. Without the slightest hesitation, Narrow walked down the left wing of the shabby corridor toward the far end. Evidently he had already surveyed the ground. Our feet made no noise on the carpet, and a moment later we came to a halt before Room 521.

NARROW cupped his hands and whispered in my ear:

"I don't anticipate any trouble, but, remember, if anything breaks—let me handle it."

I was conscious of the pounding of my heart against my ribs as Narrow's hand went out to the knob of the door. My mouth was hot and dry and I was suddenly assailed with the harrowing thought that I was going up against a six-foot six-inch killer, probably armed, with no other weapon than a rather ineffective right.

Narrow wrenched the knob suddenly and flung the portal open wide.

He crowded across the threshold and I noted that his right hand was submerged in the pocket of his coat. I came hard behind him.

As we entered, a huge, broad-shouldered, swarthy individual halted in the center of the room and glared at us menacingly.

"Well?" he spat out. "What do you want?"

"It may be that we want you, Mr. Markey," said Narrow, coolly enough.

TWIN pulses pounded in my throat at Narrow's words. A wave of blood and energy pounded through my veins as I studied the man's face.

It turned a yellowish gray under the tan, then slowly a wave of crimson manteled his cheeks.

As I watched with fascination, frozen to immobility by some sense of impending doom, the eyes narrowed to steely slits of menace. I could almost see the massive muscles beneath the coat bulge and coil. Then, with a startling rapidity that amazed me, despite the fact that I had been expecting it, the man lunged forward.

He snapped up short as if he had been spitted on the jutting nozzle of the automatic that had flashed to Narrow's hand.

"Easy, easy, Mr. Markey," counseled Narrow in a soothing voice. "I didn't expect you to take this little call like that."

"No?" snarled the other. Then abruptly all the fight went out of him. His shoulders slumped dejectedly and he stepped back from the detective.

"You win this time," he said in a broken voice.

"I don't know whether I want to win—the way you mean," answered Narrow.

Markey looked at him stupidly for a moment, then a strange, eager light flashed to his eyes.

"You mean you understand; you know that I didn't—"

Narrow nodded his head. "I know a lot," he said enigmatically.

Some of the spirit died out of Markey's face at his words. "You must," he said.

Markey awkwardly swung two chairs toward us and dropped into another.

He peered at us in a blinking fashion as though suffering from bad eyesight.

"Smoke?" he asked, as he pushed a cigar box toward us.

IT was with a strange emotion that I noted the band on the cigar I selected. It was the same that I had seen in Room 521 at the Royal Hotel that morning. The feeling strengthened as I noted that Markey was smoking brown paper cigarettes.

"Before you begin your tale," began Narrow, when our cigars were drawing well, "let me tell you mine. You arrived here two days ago from La Guayra on the Grace liner *Gulf Queen*. As soon as you had arrived you called Welch, the man whose wife you married after her divorce, on the long distance telephone and directed him to meet you in this city at the Royal Hotel.

"Last night you wrote him a note from Western Union, telling him to meet you in the lobby of the Royal Hotel at ten o'clock this morning. You met Welch at that time.

"You were with him two hours. At first you didn't quarrel; you both smoked and talked about his contemplated action with regard to your wife. But you couldn't agree.

"Then you quarreled. And because he wouldn't give 'it' to you, you choked him to death."

Markey's face went white and then an angry red again. He jumped up from his chair.

"It's a lie; an infamous lie," he roared, reaching over and grabbing Narrow by the arm. "And since you know so much about this whole affair you must know that I speak the truth. I didn't choke Welch, though he deserved it. You're right; he wouldn't give it to me. Jeered at me. It was my wife's. She had every right to it; had it painted by an artist here in New York and paid for it with her own money. But he laughed at me.

"It was a picture of her only child; the only picture she had. I wanted the picture for her. I offered to pay—ten times what it was worth. It was just a little thing, hardly bigger than a dime—a miniature."

"And while you were struggling with him, he thrust it into his mouth, to keep you from getting it and it slipped down into his throat and choked him. And while he was choking on the bed you called the hotel desk. Is that it?"

"Yes," nodded Markey. "I did what I could for him. But I knew that if I was found there with him I'd get into trouble. So I ducked." He shook his head dolefully. "It looks as if they were going to pin this on me. And it will be hard to make the police believe my story."

WE are the police," said Narrow easily. Markey started. "But I wouldn't worry about it," went on the detective. "We're the only two men in New York who know about you or anything about the affair.

"If I were you, Markey, I'd take that boat tomorrow for South America." Markey looked at him with unbelieving eyes as he stood up. Narrow reached for his hat. "And oh, yes; I almost forgot." He reached in his pocket and extracted a small gold framed miniature of a blue-eyed boy. "And give this to

Jane when you get home," he concluded.

It was after midnight when I had seen the last edition gone to press, with the real story of Welch's tragic death—minus any names, of course, that I got the final details of the case from Narrow.

"To begin with," he said, "I hadn't been in Room 521 a minute before I was sure that the man who had been with Welch had recently arrived from Venezuela. On the floor I found the wrapping of a package of cigarettes. Look it over."

He passed me the crumpled bit of paper he had picked from the floor. As I smoothed it out I saw that upon one side was printed the words, "Porteros-Elegantes, Havana, Cuba." On the space not occupied by the printing was a crude representation of a statue or ornament, that was strangely familiar to me.

"These are Havana cigarettes," I protested. "Why Venezuela?"

"The cigarettes were made in Havana," corrected Narrow, "for export only to Venezuela. That company exports cigarettes to every Latin American republic, but bears a different trade mark. And the trade mark you see on this wrapper is for the Venezuela trade. The cut of the Bolivar Statue identifies it. There's a replica of it in Central Park."

THAT explained my vague familiarity with the picture.

"Go on," I urged.

"Next, on the floor I found several matches with the word *Excellos* printed upon them. On checking up I found that was the name of a cigar manufactured in this city and retailed exclusively at five different points, and the matches marked with the word are given away only at those points of sale.

"One of these branches is located in the Pierce Hotel, frequented by Spanish-Americans. I'm getting places, see?"

"But," I countered, how did you deduce that Markey was over six feet tall?"

AH, that was easy. That bit of broken glass I called your attention to. You ignored it. But if you had examined the crushed glass closely—or observantly—you would have noted that it made a definite pattern. In short, the pattern of a shoe. I measured it and found it some thirteen inches long. Surprising. A man whose shoes are that large must of necessity be of great height—well over six feet.

"With these facts—size, the fact that he had recently arrived from Venezuela, the clue of the burnt matches—it was mere routine to trace him through the steamship line, to the hotel, to the telegraph station, up here to Welch's room.

"And then when I examined the body itself, that told me plenty, too. The marks around the dead man's throat were not sufficiently heavy to indicate manual strangulation. They were made by Markey in trying to extract the miniature from Welch's throat. I looked into Welch's mouth and saw the foreign object lodged in his throat. While you were trying to overhear what MacGrath had to say, I extracted it. From then on it was easy.

"Our little seance with Markey was just to verify my theories. He confirmed every detail."

"And so you let him go?"

"Narrow shrugged. "Why not? We could have held him, of course, until the thing had been cleaned up officially. But why make all that trouble for him? Any man who will fight to regain the miniature of the son of his wife by *another* man—must be a pretty good lad."

Four Men *of* Power

Four Big Rival Gangs Threatened the Security of Morgan City—and Four Big Shots Fought For Supremacy

By ROBERT WALLACE

Author of "Seven Men Are Murdered," "Black Death," etc.

RICHARDSON, the newly appointed chief of police of Morgan City, pressed one of the bright new buttons on his shining mahogany desk, lighted a big black cigar, and waited expectantly.

A moment later the door opened and a tall slim well-dressed man entered the room.

"You wanted me, sir?" he asked politely.

Richardson stared at him for a moment, then said hesitantly: "Are you Powell?"

The slim young man nodded. "Sure," he said.

"That's me, Powell."

Richardson waved him to a chair. "I'm a little surprised," he said as he gazed at the other. "They told me that you were the best plainclothes man down here, but you don't look like a detective."

Powell grinned at him.

"That's one of the secret of whatever success I might have had," he said. "The first rule in this game is never to look like what you are."

Richardson nodded. With a friendly gesture he offered the younger man a cigar. Soon the room was fragrant with the aroma from two freely puffed Havanas.

"I want to be frank with you, Powell," said Richardson. "I'm new to this game. As you know, the new reform administration has been elected and I've been given this job much against my will. As a matter of fact, I didn't want it, but certain personal obligations that I owe the Mayor compelled me to take it against my better judgment. I need your help to make a go of things here in the department, and I'm asking you for it now."

Powell nodded reassuringly. He appreciated frankness and straightforwardness. He had been rather afraid that he would not get along with his new chief, but after hearing these words he was pleasantly surprised.

"I'LL do all I can, sir," he said. "What is it you want first?"

"We've got to clean this town up," said the Chief emphatically. "The administration was elected on that promise and it must be done."

"It isn't as easy as it sounds," commented Powell.

Richardson nodded a trifle ruefully. "I realize that," he said. "I've been looking things over this morning and I've learned that while it's easy enough to make arrests, it's not so easy to get convictions."

"No," said the detective. "It isn't, and with the crack lawyers that the mobsters are able to afford these days, it's quite easy for us to lose a case that looks like a cinch before the trial. Furthermore, there's going to be trouble in this town within the week."

Richardson raised his eyebrows. "How do you know that?"

"A good detective has ways of knowing a lot of things that he mustn't mention before a judge," he said quietly. "I have it from an excellent source though and can assure you that in all probability there will be murder and gang war in Morgan City."

"But there can't be," cried Richardson in alarm. "It would embarrass the administration frightfully, after it was elected on a platform to abolish the gangs."

"The gangsters won't worry about any embarrassment they might cause the administration," said Powell grimly. "That's the last thing on their minds. They've been laying low for a while, but things are due to break, now."

"Why? What's the matter? Why should it happen now?"

Powell sat back in his chair and puffed thoughtfully at his cigar. "Here's the layout," he said at last. "There are four men who count for anything in the underworld of this town. Each of the four is running rackets of his own. Now Morgan City isn't big enough for that much business. One good crook could make a million here if he had a good mob and absolute control, but it's mighty slim pickings for four of them."

"Then," said Richardson, with the air of a man who has suddenly come upon a magnificent idea. "Then, why don't they get out? Why don't they leave town and leave Morgan City alone?"

"THAT'S just what they're going to do," said Powell soberly. "At least, that's what three of them are going to do."

"And the fourth?"

"The fourth will be the man who murders the other three; the man who will remain in complete control of all criminal activities in this city. Within a week there will be hell.

Each of those four men is bent on exterminating the other three and taking over the whole territory for himself."

Richardson chewed nervously on his cigar. "Well," he suggested. "Isn't that playing right into our hands. With three of them dead, it'll be a great deal easier for us to apprehend the one that is still alive."

Powell shook his head grimly. "No," he said. "Just the opposite. With four of them we've got a chance. Right now the power is split up. But if one man controls the whole outfit, he'll be too strong for us. It'll be just four times as hard as it is now."

RICHARDSON leaned over the desk and stared appealingly at the younger man.

"Powell," he said and his voice was strained and tense. "You've got to stop it somehow. You've got to wipe these mobs out. I can't tell you how to do it, but for God's sake do it."

Powell rose quickly to his feet, considering that the interview was ended for the time being.

"I'll do my best, Chief," he promised. "But I must ask you to let me play a lone hand. Please don't question my methods, no matter what I may do for, say, two weeks. Give me that long."

"Okay," said Richardson. "But how are you going to do it?"

"I don't know how," Powell repeated the other's words of a moment ago. "But somehow, I'll do it."

"Okay," said Richardson again. "Good luck."

For a long time he stared at the door which Powell had slammed behind him, a worried frown corrugating his brow.

II

AS Jim Powell had said, there were four big shots in Morgan City; four men who would have liked nothing better than to see the other three exterminated. For a long while now they had laid low, awaiting the time to strike, waiting like four cobras in the darkness to murder the others who stood between them and untold wealth and power.

At present the town was divided into four fairly equal sections. The North Side was presided over by Big Joe Getti. Getti was not overly bright, but the strength of his body stood him in good stead. He was absolutely fearless and commanded the most accurate mob of rods in the town. And now, he had just about come to the conclusion that this was a propitious moment to unleash his men upon his enemies.

Benny Feinberg, who controlled the destinies of the West Side, was the man that Big Joe reckoned as his toughest rival. In appearance, Benny was the direct antithesis of the Italian. But what he lacked in physique he more than made up for with his shrewd cunning brain.

It was an even money bet that when Big Joe attacked with his straight-shooting hordes, Benny would have an unlooked surprise for them. That was why Joe moved slowly and carefully. More than once had his sheer force of numbers been defeated by Benny's superior strategy.

Over on the East Side Tim Maguire sat back watchfully and relied upon his financial resources to pull him through. It was part of Maguire's philosophy that every man had his price, and in a pinch he firmly believed that money was more powerful than a rod.

The weakest member of the quartette was Larson, who held sway over

the poverty-stricken South Side. Of necessity his rackets were restricted to the smaller merchants. The city's slums were in his terrain. The saloons to which he sold his rotgut paid but half the prices that his rivals received.

Regarding Larson the other three did little worrying. He didn't seem important enough to do a lot of master-minding about. The real trick was to get rid of the other two. Then Larson could be easily wiped out.

But Larson had an edge that the others did not realize. He had little money and fewer men, yet he possessed something more valuable, more powerful than any of the rest—and that was the loyalty of his men. Not a man in the Larson mob who would not have willingly died for his leader. Not a man that could be bought by all Maguire's gold, all Feinberg's oily words, or all Getti's threats. They were with Larson all the way.

FURTHER, Larson had one more item in his favor. He had a spy system. A member of his mob was well placed in each of the other three. He had a written report of the rival councils' activities in less than two hours after they had happened.

Larson knew full well, that the others disregarded him, thought he was hardly worth bothering about when the big struggle came, and that fact, too, he counted in his favor.

Larson sat at his battered desk in an old warehouse in the decrepit south side of the town. Nervously he smoked cigarette after cigarette, as he anxiously awaited the arrival of one of his spies. At last the door opened, and a short thickset figure with an unmistakably Irish countenance entered.

Larson jammed out his cigarette in a dirty ash tray, and looked up eagerly.

"Well, what's going on, Murphy?"

Murphy sat down in a chair at the side of the desk and turned a grim face toward his chair.

"It's come," he said. "At last."

LARSON nodded. "I figured they'd break it any minute. What's the story?"

"I've just come from Getti's outfit," said the Irishman. "He's given orders that you, Benny and Maguire are to be wiped out, though he *did* say that you weren't so important. But he's sworn that the other two will get theirs within forty-eight hours—then you're next."

Larson nodded slowly. "Benny and Maguire have figured this, too,"—he said. "I just had reports from the two boys we've got planted there. The three mobs will be at each other's throats in twelve hours. They'll be running the cops ragged. Now's our chance to step in and take over this town."

"How?"

Larson permitted himself a smile of self-satisfaction.

"I've got a scheme," he said. "And if I do say it myself it's a pretty good one. Benny Feinberg couldn't have doped it out any better. Now get this. These are your orders."

He spoke tersely and rapidly for a few minutes, and when he had finished, Murphy stared at him in admiration.

"That's swell," he said. "It's a pushover, too. We'll own this town in two days."

"Not if we sit here talking about it," said Larson. "Now you scram back to Getti's place and do what I told you."

Murphy walked swiftly from the room, and Larson, lighting another cigarette, stared into the rising smoke and dreamed of the infinite

wealth and power that would soon be his.

III

CHIEF OF POLICE RICHARDSON jammed a savage finger down upon a button on his desk. Almost immediately the door opened and Jim Powell entered the room.

"Anything wrong, Chief?" he asked as he noted the concerned expression on the other's face.

"Anything wrong!" roared Richardson. "Plenty. Getti has just been murdered. Shot. Killed."

Powell nodded. "I sorta thought that would happen," he remarked softly, more as if he were talking to himself than the superior.

"Well, why the hell didn't you stop it?" snapped Richardson. "I thought I told you to wipe out the mobs in this town."

"You also told me that you would give me a free hand for two weeks," said Powell, and his eyes flared dangerously at the other's tone.

"True," said the chief in a quieter tone. "But you said yourself that if one of those gangsters succeeded in killing the rest, he would be so powerful we'd never be able to get him."

"I did," said Powell. "And I'll see that it doesn't happen. And now, with your permission, may I handle the Getti murder? May I go down there at once?"

"As soon as you can," said Richardson. "Quickly!"

Powell waited for no further orders, and a few minutes later he was on his way downtown in a speeding taxicab.

Jim Powell found Getti lying prostrate over his own desk at his own headquarters. The place had been taken over by the police already and no members of the Italian's mob were in evidence when the detective entered the building.

Half of the rods with which Getti had planned to capture the racketeering rights to the town had been arrested and held as material witnesses by the police, and the other half, totally demoralized by the sudden demise of their leader, had taken it on the lam to meditate in more remote parts of the country.

The gangster's body slumped heavily across a polished desk upon whose shining surface little crimson pools of blood had formed. Powell answered the salute of the patrolman on duty at the door of Getti's private office, and asked:

"Have you looked the place over?"

"I didn't touch the body, but I examined the room. I found nothing. None of the mob seems willing to talk, but I think they're as surprised as we are. I don't believe they know who pulled this job."

POWELL nodded and turned to his examination of the body. But his meticulous scrutiny revealed nothing beyond the fact that Getti had been shot through the head at close range. Already, in his mind, the detective had narrowed his list of suspects down to three, and now the problem at hand was to ascertain which one of the three remaining gang lords was responsible for the murder of their rival.

Preoccupied with his own thoughts, Powell ran deft fingers through the dead man's clothing. He glanced swiftly through various letters and papers, until finally, he came to one which caused him to give utterance to a low whistle.

"My God," he said to himself. "This is a break that only comes once in the life of every copper."

For the missive which he held in his hand was in Big Jim Getti's

handwriting and it named the man who had murdered him!

If I am found dead Tim Mcguire will have murdered me. I write this so that my boys will know who to get for this.

Joe Getti.

POWELL'S brain stopped suddenly in the midst of its deductive workings. This time he didn't have to do any master-minding. Here was the answer already written for him by the man who had been killed. He raced to the door.

"Hang on here till the coroner comes," he cried to the guard. "I've got to go downtown."

He ran from the building, hailed another cab and hastily giving an address over on the east side of the town, he was soon speeding on his way into the domain of Tim Maguire.

Maguire's mob hung out in a three-story brownstone house which concealed its nefarious purposes under the name of The Lakeside Hunting and Social Club. It was located nowhere near a lake, its social activities were confined solely to drinking and gambling.

The only part of the title which might have been taken literally was the hunting end of it, and then the members of Tim Maguire's outfit did not confine their hunting endeavors to such mild diversions as chasing foxes. No, when they hunted from this club, they hunted men.

These thoughts ran grimly through Powell's head as he pressed the tarnished brass bell at the side of the door and awaited the appearance of the guard's eyes through a small peep hole placed half-way up the portal.

A pair of beetle brows suddenly appeared and two little eyes stared at him.

"What do you want?" asked an abrupt voice.

Powell returned the thug's glance.

"Maguire," he said deliberately. "I want Maguire. You better let me in here unless you want your door broken down by the reserves. Open up."

The doorman seemed to consider this for a moment, then apparently he decided that there was a certain logic in Powell's words. Slowly the heavy armored door swung open, and Powell stepped inside.

"Okay," he said. "Now, where's Maguire?"

The doorman shrugged. "I ain't seen him today. Go ahead in and ask the boys."

He jerked his head toward the staircase. The detective, after a moment's hesitation, dropped his right hand in his gun pocket and slowly started to mount the stairs.

A FEW seconds later found him standing tensely on the threshold of what appeared to be a huge barroom. A score or more of Maguire's men lounged around the room, drinking and talking, but the instant the detective appeared a swift and sudden silence swept over them. Hostile eyes stared at him as he stood there. His hand was still on his gun as he spoke:

"Where's Maguire?"

Not a man answered, yet no one moved his eyes from the man who had spoken to them. Powell was aware of a vague apprehension. He well knew that he was confronting a room full of killers, the least of whom would have sent a bullet ripping through his heart and thought little more about it.

"Where's Maguire?" he said again.

A raw-boned, evil-faced man, leaning aganist the bar, answered him this time.

"What do you want him for?"

"Murder," said Powell evenly. "Where is he?"

"Whose murder?"

"You know damned well whose murder," said the detective blandly. "Jim Getti's murder."

As he finished speaking he let his eyes sweep the room with something more than interest. There was no doubt that utter surprise had fallen upon the men who had heard his words. Even the tall individual at the bar to whom he had spoken was staring at him in utter and honest amazement.

"You're nuts," he said. "Maguire didn't bump off Getti."

"Maybe not," said Powell. "His lawyer can prove that in court for him. But it's my job to bring him in. Where is he?"

The other grinned. "If that's all you want him for," he said slowly, "I'll take you to him. He can beat that rap so easy, he may as well get pinched now and get it over quicker."

"Okay," said Powell. "Where is he?"

"Come with me."

Powell turned and followed the gaunt gangster up two more flights of stairs to what once had been the attic of the house.

THEY stopped before a closed door and knocked.

Two more knocks and still no answer. Maguire's henchman, whose name Powell had discovered was Klinger, looked puzzled.

"That's funny," he said. "I'm sure he didn't go out. Maybe he's asleep. We'll go in. I got a key."

He gave an ejaculation of surprise when he found the door unlocked. Powell hastily followed him into the private sleeping quarters of the East Side mogul.

Klinger's startled oath crackled in his ear as they entered the gang leader's bedroom. Powell sprang past him into the room and stared at the figure in the bed.

Tim Maguire lay back upon his pillow in a profound slumber from which he would never awaken. An ugly red hole, drilled right through the center of his forehead, was the only indication that he was not sleeping peacefully and temporarily, instead of having embarked upon that eternal rest from which no man ever returns.

"Good God!" yelled Klinger. "Bumped off and right here in his own headquarters. Somebody'll croak for this. Somebody will get theirs."

"Somebody will," said Powell quietly. "Now will you phone Police Headquarters and report this while I look around a bit."

Klinger, too overcome by the sudden turn of events to argue, turned to do the detective's bidding. The instant he was gone Powell's keen eyes searched the room slowly. His wandering gaze stopped abruptly, becoming riveted on a small table at the side of the bed.

He crossed the room, picked up the sheet of writing paper that lay there with some twenty words scrawled across it. He read it, and as he did so, a frown crossed his brow and his usually clear eyes became clouded with a vague worry.

The note read:

I hear that Benny Feinberg is laying to get me. This is written to tip off my boys in case I get mine.

Tim Maguire.

POWELL stowed the note in his pocket with a sigh. Then he smiled ruefully.

"This is too much," he muttered to himself. "Too much for one day."

The arrival of the man from Headquarters interrupted him, and the

detective leaving the place in the other's charge hurried downstairs and jumping in a cab returned to Headquarters. Half an hour later he was closeted with the Chief of Police.

"WELL," Richardson was saying. "It seems open and shut to me, Powell. You find a man murdered. You find a note in his pocket charging another man with the crime. You go to the second man. You find him killed, too, with a letter near his bed charging still a third man with that crime. It seems easy."

"Too easy," commented Powell.

Richardson looked at him keenly.

"You seem to be looking for complications that aren't there," he said testily.

Powell raised his eyebrows and achieved a half shrug, but said nothing. Richardson continued his expounding of the situation.

"It's easy," he said again. "Maguire killed Getti. Feinberg killed Maguire. Two of them are out of the way already. Arrest Feinberg for murder. That gets rid of another one. There's only one left, and you told me that he was the least powerful of them all."

"Larson," said Powell. "He was the weakest, but he won't be with three of them out of the way."

Richardson waved this aside. "Where's Feinberg?" he asked.

Powell shrugged again. "I don't know."

Richardson stared at him.

"My God, man," he said. "Here you have a murderer, a man you can convict in any court in the country and you don't make a move to arrest him. Why?"

"Because," said Powell evenly. "I don't like those two notes the dead men left behind them. One of them was lucky, and I might have fallen for it. But when I find two dead men each of whom conveniently leaves a note behind him telling the world who killed him, I get a little leery."

"Nonsense," said Richardson. "Did you check up on the handwriting?"

Powell nodded reluctantly. "That end of it was all right," he said. "There's no doubt that Maguire and Getti wrote the notes themselves, but it still looks funny to me."

"Rot," snorted Richardson. "Go out and bring in Feinberg. Arrest him for murder."

Powell rose to his feet and bowed stiffly.

"Very well, sir," he said formally. "I'll bring him in."

He turned and left the room; and during the long ride to Benny Feinberg's his brow was wrinkled and he was lost in thought.

Benny Feinberg, who relied on his brains more than the rods of his men, admitted the detective without preamble. Powell refused the cigar and the brandy that the other offered him. Feinberg glanced at him in mild surprise.

"I thought you liked good liquor and tobacco."

POWELL smiled at him. "I do, Benny," he said. "But I can't very well accept it from a man I've got to arrest for murder."

Feinberg's face blanched.

"Murder? Of who?"

"Getti and Maguire."

"Are you nuts?" demanded Feinberg. "Are you crazy? I didn't even know they'd been bumped."

"Maybe not," said Powell. "But I've got to take you in any way. Chief's orders."

Little Benny turned an alarmed face to the cop.

"But, why me? Why hang it on me? If Getti and Maguire got theirs,

it was just as liable to be Larson that gave it to them as me?"

"Maguire left a note saying that if he got his it was you who gave it to him."

"The rat," said Benny Feinberg unemotionally.

"Well, come along," said Powell. "You can tell the rest of it to the chief."

Benny demurred no longer. They took a cab down to Headquarters.

On the way the little gangster turned to Powell.

"Listen," he said earnestly. "I didn't pull this job. This is a frame-up on somebody's part. You find out who did this and I'll see that you get fifty grand."

Powell shook his head.

"Never mind the fifty grand, Benny," he said. "I'm going to work on this case anyway."

Leaving the prisoner at Headquarters, Powell returned to his apartment and resorting to his pipe and a pound of the blackest tobacco manufactured, he gave himself over to the problem of the killings of the two gang leaders of Morgan City.

Now, the detective held no brief for little Benny Feinberg. It was his job as a sworn upholder of the law to see that Benny was permanently put out of business, yet he hardly believed Benny guilty of the crime for which he was arrested.

The jobs had been too pat entirely. It was unusual to say the least, for a couple of mugs, like Getti and Maguire, to leave little love notes informing the world that someone was planning to kill them. To do that they must have been pretty leery.

THERE was one man who would have anything to gain by the whole occurrence and that man was Larson. Powell well realized this, and though he had a strong hunch that Larson was somehow mixed up in it, there was no theory that he could evolve that would hold water.

Even if Larson had engineered the entire thing, how had he got those notes written. Powell had hoped against hope that they were merely clever forgeries, but the handwriting experts to whom the missives had been given, swore positively that they had been written by the deceased men whose names appeared at the bottom of the sheets of paper.

ARRIVING at no tenable theory, he decided to play his hunch. He jammed on his hat and set out to see Larson.

He came upon him in one of the cheap South Side saloons which he supplied with booze. Powell noted with satisfaction that he was alone, though he had little doubt that the bartender and the hangers-on would come to Larson's assistance if necessary.

Larson, ensconced behind a foaming beaker of beer, seemed very pleased with himself, withal a little drunk. Seeing Powell, he greeted him effusively.

"Hello, copper, have one on me. Have one on Larson."

Powell accepted a glass of beer and stood up at the bar with the South Side leader.

"I hear Feinberg's in stir," said Larson with a grin.

"Yeah," said Powell. "But I don't think he ought to be."

Larson frowned and stared at him.

"Why not? He killed Maguire, didn't he?"

"Did he?" asked Powell quietly.

Larson replaced his beer on the bar and a faint gleam of apprehension shone in his eyes.

"What do you mean by that crack?" he asked.

Powell shrugged,

"Nothing much," he said careless-

ly. "Except, I figure that those notes may have been forgeries."

Larson smiled and shook his head.

"Oh, no, they weren't," he said confidently.

"No?"

"No. They wrote those notes themselves, copper. Getti and Maguire wrote those notes themselves."

Powell's hand was on the butt of his .38 as he said:

"How do you know that?"

It may have been the beer; it may have been the suddenness of the question. It may have been that Larson thought he was trapped. Anyway he forgot for the moment that he was playing a subtle game of wits, and as he sensed danger he fell back upon his customary defense.

With a single flashing gesture his hand jerked toward his shoulder holster. An automatic gleamed under the lights of the saloon. Two shots rang out simultaneously.

It was Larson who fell, his own smoking weapon still clutched tightly in his hand. Ten feet back of Powell, a jagged chunk of plaster had fallen from the wall, as Larson's bullet had plunged into it.

POWELL moved his back up against the bar, his rod still in his hand. He covered the room.

"You, bartender," he said. "Phone for an ambulance. The rest of you stay where you are till I tell you to move. The first guy who doesn't obey those orders gets a slug in his guts."

In the ambulance, Larson spoke in a thin weak voice.

"I guess I'm through, copper," he said. "You got me all right. After all Feinberg ain't such a rat. I'll give you the dope that'll spring him."

Powell bent his ear down close to the dying man's lips and listened intently to his last words which would save from the chair the enemy he had tried to destroy.

RICHARDSON bit the end off a cigar nervously.

"I hear you've released Feinberg without orders from me," he said harshly. "I demand an explanation."

"You'll get it," said Powell. "You asked me to clean this town up. There were four big thugs in it. Now there aren't any. Three of them are dead, and one is on his way out of the state right now. I've carried out your orders."

Still the chief did not seem entirely mollified. "You've still got some explaining to do," he said. "We had Feinberg booked on a murder charge and you let him go. All right tell it."

"Feinberg wasn't guilty of murder," said Powell. "Larson told me the whole story before he died. It was a mighty clever scheme to make Larson the big shot of this town. Larson had spies in all the other mobs. Both Getti and Maguire trusted the men who were selling them out to Larson. Larson had these two men tip off Getti and Maguire of the mythical plan to kill them. They suggested that the gang leaders write these notes so that their own mob could wreak vengeance if the plan succeeded.

"Once Larson got those notes written, he simply came along and had his own men bump them off. The notes were found as he figured they would be. Then he had the killing of Getti explained by tying it on Maguire. He killed Maguire before we could get there and explained that by leaving Maguire's note accusing Feinberg. He then figured that we'd send Feinberg to the chair for murder, which left him in complete control."

Richardson digested this slowly.

(*Continued on page* 129)

The Corpse on the Road

A Tense Story of a Diabolical Murder—and the Breath Taking Investigations of Lone Wolf Steele, Famous Detective

By KERRY McROBERTS

Author of "The House of Death," "The Prowling Creature," etc.

KERRITON'S shotgun was gripped ready in his hands as he crept up cautiously behind the dog. Deep from the animal's throat came a rumbling growl.

Kerriton observed the dog.

The hackles along the neck and shoulders bristled like the quills of a porcupine.

The crackling pile of dead brush beneath Martin Kerriton's feet never budged the animal.

He crouched frozen like a statue, his nose quivering, eyes fixed on some object beyond.

Reaching a spot from which he could look over into the narrow dirt road Kerriton halted like a man thrown back by some great force. His eyes started from their sockets. In front of him, there in the middle of the road, he saw the body of a man. Twisted and bent like a rag, the body was sprawled in the mud. Kerriton rubbed a quick rough hand across his eyes.

"Hey!" he called out, half dazed.

For perhaps a minute or two the farmer stood riveted to the ground, staring at the man, as if waiting for him to get up. Then it suddenly dawned upon him that he was looking on death. The shotgun in his hands started to slip from his fingers. The dog's growl grew audibly deeper, fiercer, with the sudden movement of his master.

Martin Kerriton was no country hick even if he was a fruit farmer who had spent all of his life with the soil. He read the newspapers, kept in touch with the world and events through the radio in his parlor. This was no case for a farmer to pry into. He must call in the police. He turned on his heel, after casting a quick, hopeless glance right and left along the road. "You Bobs," he called the dog as he went. "Heel!"

THE dog, his muzzle lifted searchingly into the air, groping for scent up wind, came reluctantly, falling in at his master's heels.

Kerriton almost ran through the heavy field, soft with the rain of two solid days, to his house, It was about three-quarters of a mile and he arrived puffing.

Immediately he telephoned to the State Police Post, three miles down the new highway. It was still very early in the morning and a drowsy voice answered him. Constable Wilson. Kerriton, excited now, shouted his message: A murder on the old Ridge Road.

Twenty minutes later, heralded by the machine-gun roar of their motors, two state policemen shot into the broad barnyard of the Kerriton place, raising a bedlam of noise from the dogs and stock.

Martin Kerriton emerged from the house.

"Hullo," said Constable Wilson, stepping in front of his partner, Charley Devlin. "Where is it, Kerriton?"

"I'll show you," said Martin Kerriton. "You'll have to walk in anyways, even if you took your machines. The mud's pretty heavy in that road. We'll go cross the farm."

THE trio reached the edge of the road where Kerriton had first discovered the body. Climbing the fence they stood in the weeds at Wilson's orders.

"Wait a minute," he said tersely. "Wait!" He waved his pointed finger around broadly, over the road in an imaginery circle that left the body in the center. "Not a mark anywhere," he said. "It looks like—"

"Yeah," said Martin Kerriton, "I thought he was one o' them poor devils taken for a ride, but somehow I couldn't make the idea stick. Never thought o' lookin' for tracks."

Wilson glanced around them, up and down the road. There were no wheel tracks of any sort, wagon or automobile. There was not even a footprint. The two officers walked carefully along the weeded edges on both sides of the road. Somebody might have stood there and hurled the dead man into the road.

"Not a sign," said Charley Devlin. "What do you make of it, 'Stew?' "

Wilson was bent over the twisted body. He shook his head thoughtfully. He was making a search of the man's clothing. Without warning he looked up swiftly into Martin Kerriton's face. The farmer was standing stiffly, his eyes fixed on the muddy, disfigured features of the murdered man.

"You ever see him before?" Wilson asked sharply. "Know him?"

"No," said Kerriton, and told his brief story of how he had found the body while hunting woodchucks with

his dog. "It was Bobs," he said. "The dog's got a fine nose."

II

CONSTABLE WILSON left Devlin on guard by the body and returned across the farm with Kerriton. From the farmhouse he telephoned the county headquarters of the state police, also the police of the nearest town, Rumsey. By mid morning an investigation had been started. In fact, it had been completed to the point where the police authorities ran up against the blank wall. A man, whose clothing was of the finest quality, but bore no identification marks whatever, had been found murdered about midway on the old Ridge Road.

From the wound discovered on the back of his head, near the base of the brain, it was decided that he had been killed with some blunt weapon. Further than this they could not go. There were no wheel tracks to suggest that the man had been the victim of a "ride" and no footprints to point anywhere.

When another search was made for the man's hat and none found, the police looked at one another. Lieutenant Schultz, of county headquarters, divided his men once more and ordered a wide, cordon search of the ground on both sides of the road. The ground was heavy and soft from the rains and, aside from the tracks made by Martin Kerriton and the first two of the State Police, nothing was found.

"Then he must have dropped from the skies," concluded Schultz.

With this point in mind a radio message was flashed to the airports between the Atlantic coast and the Rockies. Hours dragged by and the answers came in one by one. No passenger had been lost or missed by a plane since February when, as the authorities knew, a well-known broker, caught in the market, had hurled himself from a plane while crossing the Big Smokies of the Blue Ridge Range.

The police were stumped. Lieutenant Schultz ordered the body moved, reminded Martin Kerriton to hold himself in readiness for further questioning in the event that a new angle should present itself, and, cursing the luck that had checked an unsolved murder mystery against his district, returned to Headquarters to make his report.

There he came face to face with Calvin Steele. Police called Steele the "Lone Wolf" and he deserved the name. A tireless, shrewd detective, who generally picked up the threads where official fingers dropped them.

Lone Wolf Steele dragged healthily at a cigarette as he sat in the police barracks and watched the lieutenant and his staff swing off the road.

"Hullo, Lone Wolf," said Schultz in greeting. "What ill wind brings you here?"

IT was always banter between these two, but behind it lay the cold, hard fact that all the uniformed police resented this easy-going, smiling, clever dick who worked out crimes like a Sherlock Holmes and could handle himself with the toughest gangsters known in the annals of crime.

"I was passing," said Steele. "Thought I'd say 'howdy.' Any objections?"

"None," said Schultz, frowning, "in fact, we've got a simple little case of murder here that would give even you a nice day's work at clearing up." As he spoke, Schultz tossed a small newspaper package on a table near Steele. "The effects," he remarked and went into the locker room.

Steele reached over and unfolded the crude bundle disclosing the articles which had been found in the murdered man's pockets. He saw a small common wooden lead pencil with an eraser attached to one end, a package containing three cigarettes of a popular brand, a half-used packet of paper matches and two pennies. The ace detective toyed with the things idly, picking them up and laying them down.

Finally he called through the half opened door.

"Where's this body, Lieutenant?"

Schultz called back, telling him he could find it in the back room of the building. Steele arose, started toward the door, turned back and picked up the matches, then followed in the direction of the state police officer's voice.

WHILE he studied the body, clothing, condition of the hair, hands, finger nails and estimated the height and weight of the dead man, he fired questions at Schultz. Little by little he drew his own picture of the scene on the old Ridge Road.

"Only way I can figure it," declared Schultz finally, "is that the man was thrown or jumped from an airplane. What do you think, Lone Wolf?"

"I think you're about right," agreed Steele.

"Well," said Schultz in a satisfied manner, "we're wrong. I've sent out a call to every field this side of the Rockies. Not a single passenger has been lost."

"I still think it's right," stated Steele, coldly, as he looked again at the body to engrave a mental picture of the man in his mind.

"You think you can run it down?" called Schultz as Steele faded through the door.

"It's a plain case of murder," answered Lone Wolf Steele. "And if it is there's something behind it, more than just a human life. I'll try my luck."

"You'll need it," added Schultz, but Steele had gone. He was out in the driveway of the police station where he climbed into a small fast car. In another moment he was out on the road burning up miles.

III

DRIVING East at a fast clip Lone Wolf Steele turned into the state road leading southward. He was still many miles from his first objective, the nearest flying field where passenger ships arrived and departed with the regularity of railroad trains.

The little car roared smoothly along through traffic and behind the wheel slouched a man hunter who never missed the smallest clue. Killers were his specialty, for, as Steele believed and his record proved, the murderer always tipped his hand.

At the airport the Lone Wolf presented himself to the manager, showed his credentials, and arranged for a fast, non-stop flight.

"Where to?" inquired the airport man.

"Cleveland," said Steele, "and I want to send a couple of wires from here, if you don't mind."

There were no passenger ships scheduled for Cleveland that day, but the airport management ran out a small three-seated cabin job, and put mechanics to work on it at once. Steele sent two code telegrams, one of which was directed to a bureau in Washington, then sat in the airport office from where he could watch the experts working on the ship that would carry him.

As he watched, the Lone Wolf fingered a packet of paper matches which bore the imprint of a hotel in Cleveland. It was a slim clue, but

it was a start. By eleven o'clock, with the flood lights blazing across the field, the little high-wing monoplane ran out over the smooth tarmac, wheeled around, roared a challenge to all of the four winds and climbed into the darkness of the night sky.

In the cabin sat the Lone Wolf, watching the lights of the field dwindle to mere sparks below him, seeing the snakey outline of the state road with its myriad guide lights, fall away to a tiny thread of fire. Ahead of him in the cockpit sat the pilot and, above the thunder roar of the motor, Steele could hear him singing.

Steele felt the slight tilt of the ship which leaned him back a little, then it straightened out, then again he was leaning against the back of his folding seat. Climbing, climbing.

THE man ahead of him still sang and Steele saw that it was dark in the cockpit except for the dim lights on the instrument panel. He saw the pilot's hand reach back, groping, grasp the heavy fabric curtain behind him and draw it shut.

Steele was alone in the passenger cabin. It was like sitting in a sedan on wheels, only there were no traffic noises.

Reaching up himself the Lone Wolf switched off the cabin light, and sat staring through the window at the faint pin points of light far below. By and by he closed his eyes, stretched his legs out before him, and began to speculate on where this man-hunt would end up.

Early next morning he landed at the company's field in Cleveland where he left the plane with the request that the pilot stick around for a day or two. He might need him again—in a hurry.

A taxi dropped him off at the hotel he wanted, and it was only a few minutes before Lone Wolf Steele was seated in the office of the hotel manager.

"A man about five foot seven," said Steele, describing the murdered man as nearly as he could. "Just starting to get bald in front, hair brown, a little sandy, maybe. He wore a brown suit, brown tie, tan silk shirt, and tan brogues."

THE hotel manager rubbed a well-manicured hand across his jowls. His brow was wrinkled in a deep frown.

"It must have been within the last three days, say," suggested the Lone Wolf. "Smooth shaven, round face, regular features, maybe, and weighed about a hundred and fifty."

"Mister Maxtil," declared the manager. "Thomas L. Maxtil. You describe him to the letter. Yes." He became a little excited. "You say he has been murdered. Now isn't that—"

"What I want to find out," said Steele calmly, "is what his business was. Do you know?"

"No. He has stopped here before, but he was a very quiet guest. We saw little of him."

"Let me talk to your phone operator," said Steele.

"Certainly. Will you come this way?"

"Sure. Where does Maxtil come from?"

"New York City," said the hotel man. "Central Park West, I believe, if I remember rightly. Isn't it—"

"Don't mention this to your operators," warned Lone Wolf as they entered the phone room.

The chief operator, an efficient young woman, produced the duplicate call records for the past week. Steele studied the slips checked against Room 90. He noted that among other calls there were three

in two days between Maxtil and one particular number.

"Who is that number?" asked Steele. "Did you hear?"

"No, sir, but I can find out." The young woman plugged in a wire and Steele heard her voice intermingled with the voices of the girl beside her and two guests who stood at the ledge along the opposite end of the small room.

"It's a party named Colby," stated the girl, turning to Steele. "The address, too, if you want it."

She handed him a sheet of paper from the small record pad.

Steele stared at the name and address for several seconds.

"Well, now," he mused, "we're getting somewhere. Do you know who this Colby is?"

The hotel manager said he thought the name was familiar. Possibly the dealer in precious stones. He'd seen him once at one of the Jewelers' Convention banquets held at the hotel.

Lone Wolf Steele nodded grimly, left the hotel, entered a taxi and was driven to the address the phone girl had given him.

JULIAN COLBY was, indeed, a dealer in precious stones. His offices, built like a bank, were housed behind steel cages and armed guards flanked the doors. Steele flashed his credentials and was ushered into Colby's private office.

"Mr. Maxtil," said Colby genially. "Why, yes. Certainly. A very fine gentleman. What we call in our business a collector's agent."

"And his business with you, Mister Colby?" prompted Steele eagerly now that he was getting on the trail.

"In your official capacity, Mister Steele, only," said Colby seeming to lower his voice. "I am telling you this in strictest confidence."

"Yes."

"Mister Maxtil took the Craven necklace with him. You know it? Thirty-nine perfect, graduated diamonds."

"And—"

"He bought them for a client of his in New York— Why, what has happened? Is there anything—"

"Maxtil," said Steele, rising and leaning toward Colby, "has been murdered."

IV

LONE WOLF STEELE having established what the police call the motive for the crime, returned at once to the hotel. His parting advice to the dealer in precious stones was for strict silence. Whoever murdered Thomas Maxtil did so to steal the Craven diamonds.

At the hotel Steele moved about among the employees until he arrived at the elbow of the doorman. The tall major domo did remember Mister Maxtil. Indeed, he was a very nice gentleman. Yes, he was at the hotel door when Mister Maxtil checked out on Thursday.

"I called a taxi for him," declared the hotel attendant.

"Would you remember the driver?" inquired Steele, going through a routine questioning. "Did you hear anything that he said?"

"No, sir," the major domo wore a worried frown. "These hacks come an' go— But now that I recall it, I did hear Mister Maxtil say somethin' to the man—somethin' about an 'airport.' But the airplanes are getting so common nowadays that I didn't give it another thought."

Steele nodded and slipped the uniformed man a sizable tip. The airport was without doubt the same one he had landed at in the morning. So there was nothing else to do but drive back there. Calling a taxi,

the detective jumped in and sprawled out on the seat.

He, at least, knew now who the man was. There was small doubt of it with the double identification of the hotel manager and Julian Colby. Also he had learned the motive for the murder. All that was left was to run down the killer or gang, which was not unlikely.

At the airport Lone Wolf Steele went into closed conference with Frederick Goore, the manager of the field. He noted from the first Goore's wary attitude. Something of the crime was known.

Steele went right to the point.

"A man by the name of Maxtil," he said, "took passage on one of your ships some time last Thursday. Look over your lists and let us get started. Maybe somebody here would remember him."

GOORE shook his head dully, keeping his dark eyes on the face of the detective.

"I'm fully acquainted with the names of all the passengers, Mister Steele," he said. "There are not so many these days that I could forget one."

"Listen, Mister Goore," continued Steele, "Maxtil came to this field. He took a plane. Don't ask me how I know it. I'm telling you. Maxtil flew out of Cleveland. That much I do know. What I'm after is the ship that carried him and the crew."

"Nobody by the name of Maxtil," repeated Goore firmly, "or anyone answering his description boarded a ship of ours in the regular transport service."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Steele, feeling that he had hit upon an important point.

"I mean," Goore's voice was lowered perceptibly and he looked furtively toward the closed door of his private office. "I mean—well this is strictly between ourselves Mister Steele—no hint of this has been allowed to get out of the field— One of our small special planes was stolen from this field last Thursday— Don't look at me like that— We've been trying to find trace of it— Our pilots are keeping their eyes—"

"A plane was stolen!" repeated Steele, half unbelieving. "What do you mean by that? How—"

"Last Thursday night—I remember especially that the field was very busy—a dozen planes came and went on this field," said Goore. "Nobody noticed it until morning when we discovered the Boehme Butterfly was gone—also two men who had been working here."

"So," said Stelle. "A ship and two of your men. Pilots?"

"No," said Goore, "just two floaters who wanted to work for lodging and meals. I put them to work as porters, cleaning up."

"And they did," added Steele, without a trace of humor.

Goore then listened gravely to the account of the mysterious murder of Thomas Maxtil, after which he gave Steele a description of the two men who had disappeared with the ship.

The Lone Wolf, rapt deep in thought and irked at the lack of action, walked across the field to where his own ship stood.

"Better warm her up," he said to the pilot who was lounging in the sun at the side of a hangar. "We're going back to Teterboro."

V

STEELE, putting the facts together, was convinced now that the crime was the work of jewel thieves. It had been planned carefully and though the detective was able now to prove the identity of the victim and send out an alarm to be on the lookout for loose diamonds,

he had no slightest clue to the identity of the murderers.

That there were at least two of them he was certain. The dates fixed this with Maxtil's checking out of the hotel and the men stealing the ship. One of them must have been a flyer, and this presented an even darker mystery in the mind of the detective. In all his long list of criminals he knew of not a single one who had had an aviation background.

"When we get down over Northern New Jersey," Steele called to his pilot, "see if you can fly her low over this area." He passed a small folding map to the flyer and pointed with his finger at the region surrounding the old Ridge Road.

"Uh, huh," grunted the pilot.

Throughout the flight they had been keeping an eye out for signs of a ship on the ground below. A yellow fuselage with blue wings. When they slid down out of the sky over the Ramapos, Steele studied the position of the Ridge Road. He noted the point where it left the new concrete highway; where it met it again.

It was easy to see that the new road had straightened out the long curve in this old back country dirt wagon track. For that was all it had been. The development of automobiles had left this ribbon of mud a mere deserted lane, perhaps a mile and a half long.

THE more Steele thought of it the more he felt the spot itself had something to do with the perpetrators. He tried to figure out a reason for the killers carrying the murdered man all the way from Cleveland before dropping him to the ground. Suddenly, with an audible chuckle, Steele sat back in his seat, nodding.

"Suppose," he called to the pilot, and stood up at the curtain so he could make himself heard, "suppose we had a dead body in this ship and we wanted to drop it on that little road down there. How would you do it? I mean how could you be sure the body would land in the road?"

"Hold on tight," answered the pilot. "I'll show you the only way." He was shouting now as he shoved his stick forward and the fast plane went into a swift power dive. "Yuh got the body braced against the left door there, say. Here we go!"

STEELE saw the earth coming up at him at a speed that might have been three miles a minute. Buildings, cars, trees took swift shape as they plunged downward, the motor blasting its way through space like a comet. Then, as suddenly, the roar ceased. The pilot had cut the motor and was sliding down an invisible chute directly over the dirt road.

It seemed as if they would certainly crash. Steele, who had nerves as steady as his name, felt the thrill of his companion's air mastery. The motor coughed now, and again came the roar of its powerful engine. They were close to the road, a few hundred feet. It was dangerous business.

"When I shout," yelled the pilot, "you brace yourself with a shoulder and knee on opposite sides of the door. Grab the body and shove the door latch open."

It all happened in a moment. Steele simulated the shoving of an inert body. He felt the pressure of the air against the loosened cabin door and knew that a dead weight aided by a shove from a man inside would have let a body go toppling downward. Even as he saw this in his mind's eye, he felt the banking of the ship, and they were climbing once more into the skies.

See?" shouted the pilot.

Lone Wolf Steele shouted back. He saw more than just the mere mechanical process by which the killers had disposed of the body of Maxtil. He saw also that some one in that murder ship knew the old Ridge Road, knew that it was a deserted, weed-choked lane.

With this new angle to the mystery, Lone Wolf Steele left the plane at Teterboro Field and grabbed a taxi for New York. Speeding across the meadows, down through the traffic to the Holland Tunnel, he was soon in the city. A few minutes later he was searching the files at Headquarters.

VI

A FLASH was sent out to the police and detective bureaus to be on the lookout for the necklace in whole or part. Steele knew the criminal code well enough to be sure that the necklace would be broken up, the stones disposed of separately if possible. Fences, too, were warned. Telephone communication with the address on Central Park West confirmed the Cleveland hotel manager's statement, and settled definitely the question of the murdered man's identity. It was Thomas L. Maxtil.

Steele poured through the files. He was looking for a man whose record showed activities, or acquaintance, in the region where the body was found. The description of the men missing from the Cleveland airport would have fit a hundred crooks.

Steele pinned more faith in the records. The hours he spent delving into the files were finally rewarded by one record which was listed under the name of Bernard Dayoon.

"Same size, type, coloring," mused Steele, reading the details and comparing the pictures. "Dayoon. Alias Benjamin Dixon, alias Bob 'Kid' Duncan. Highway robbery, convicted Sept. 17, 19—"

Lone Wolf Steele nodded as he noted the police record and caught in Dayoon's history the mention of the fact that the man had more than once posed as an automobile mechanic. Planes would be just another step, a modern move for him. And his record began fourteen years ago—in the town of Rumsey.

With a last careful look at the front face and profile of Bernard Dayoon, Lone Wolf Steele walked out of Headquarters and took a cab. Far over on the East Side he alighted, dismissed the driver and started slowly along the street toward a corner where the elevated railroad rattled past the intersection.

Old Carney had been running a fence in Number 37 for many years. Generations of crooks had brought him fortune and no little fame of a sort. The sort, of course, that the police frown upon. Steele turned into Carney's place without glancing either right or left. The store was dark, dusty, piled with countless bundles and hung from the ceiling were more.

BEHIND a high rusty looking brass fence stood old Carney. His face, as he beheld the entrance of Lone Wolf Steele, flashed with a quick crafty look. Then the expression was swept away by what was intended to be a friendly smile. To the Lone Wolf it was the grimace of an old ape.

"Hyah, Carney?" began Steele. "How's business?"

"Rotten, thanks," said the fence. "What can I sell you Mister Steele?"

"A couple of nice sparklers, Carney," said Steele. "For a starter."

"I ain't got one in the place," whined Carney. "I'll be honest with yuh, Lone Wolf."

"All right," said Steele, his man-

ner changing swiftly. "Let's begin all over. Open that gate."

Carney hesitated, made a helpless gesture with a shrug of his shoulders. "What for, Mister Steele? Ain't I tellin' yuh—"

Steele stepped to the barred door. His eyes were cruel now, meaningful, and his lips were drawn back from his teeth as he snapped out his next words.

"Open it up, Carney," he purred savagely. "You and me have got to understand each other. Open up!"

CARNEY came over tremulously, fidgetted at the snap lock and shot it open. Steele pushed through the gate and took a quick grip on Carney's arm just below the shoulder.

"In the back," he said. "I'm giving you a chance."

The back of the place was even darker than the front, piled higher with stores of miscellaneous bundles, each with a history.

Carney was pushed against a bale that might have contained rare silk. Steele wasn't interested in that. He was facing Carney now, with the little fence looking up into the powerful detective's hard eyes.

"I want Bernie Dayoon," said Lone Wolf Steele. "Come through, Carney."

"Dayoon?" repeated the crafty fence. "I don't know him—I never—"

"Dayoon, I said," Steele's tone was dominant. "Dayoon—alias Dixon—alias Duncan— You know him as well as you know your street number."

Oh, said Carney, groping, stalling. "You mean—"

"Bernie Dayoon," snapped Steele. "Where is he— Open up, you vulture, or I'll—" Steele took a vise-like grip on the vest lapels of the fence, a twist, and jerked, throwing the other's head back with a snap. "Where is he? Spill it now or I'll ride you over. And believe me, Carney, this time you won't come back. Are you going to tell me what I want to know?"

Carney grovelled like the crawling creature that he was. He squirmed and grunted like a fat porker, mumbling something about "being killed for it."

"You'll either get killed or life," warned the Lone Wolf. "We can hang it on you, anyway. Where is he? I want him. Speak!"

Steele shook the fence until his jowls flapped. A footstep sounded on the grating outside the door. Steele held Carney, silent, neither moving. Then the steps went away. Carney wilted.

"I'll tell," he cried! "But for gawd's sake don't—"

"Where?" snarled the Lone Wolf.

"At Karina's."

Steele glared at Carney. "If you tip them off," he warned, "I'll come back here and settle with you. Get me?"

Carney nodded painfully as the Lone Wolf edged his way out of Number 37 and walked swiftly back up the street in the direction from which he had come. His eyes were all about him as he walked. He knew where he was; what a chance he was taking. But he had a greater risk before him. At Karina's place. Over by Mulberry Bend.

VII

THERE would be a lookout on the door at Karina's. The Lone Wolf knew this and prepared for it. Before he turned into the dingy littered block, he loosened his tie, turned his soft hat brim up in front, so that he looked a little drunk. A tousled strand of his dark brown hair he dragged out

from under the hat in front and let it hang over his brow.

At Karina's he pounded on the door. A face appeared in the peephole.

"What!"

"S-h-h-h," whispered the Lone Wolf. "Wanna speak wit' Karina. She wansa see me."

"Yuh gotta card?" demanded the half-hidden face.

"Whosh card?" argued the man outside.

Then came a voice from inside. A soft, low contralto, saying: "Open the door a leetle, Patsy. See who he is."

The door opened a crack and Steele saw inside—saw a long, narrow passageway, opening out on a wider room beyond, where men and women were sitting at tables. In the passage stood the soft-voiced creature. Karina, herself, soft as butter, eyes blacker than the shadow in which she stood, teeth gleaming.

"What you want?" she called and the purr in her voice was as friendly as a kitten's. "Let him come, Patsy."

PATSY, a mean looking yegg with a scarred underlip, opened the door wider. Steele, a bit bent and awry, walked in, making a job of walking very straight. Karina waited for him midway in the passage. When he reached her, she peered up into his face and her red rouged lips parted in a half snarl.

"The Lone Wolf," she whispered savagely. "What you want here?"

"S-h-h-h," said Steele softly. "Nothing's going to happen to you, lady. Keep your mouth shut and play dumb. I want Bernie Dayoon."

"Oh!" Her voice threatened to break into a shriek, but Steele laid a hand on her elbow. "I've got the whole block surrounded," he lied. "Nobody'll be hurt if you keep your fingers off. Where is he?"

KARINA shrugged her shoulders, her big eyes narrowed to the danger line.

"Go find heem," she spat at Steele. "Eff they get you, I have nothing to do with eet."

Steele took her fleshy arm in a firm grip and started walking her into the big room. He leaned down, laughing and talking into her face, so that she was forced to look at him. It appeared that here was a privileged customer, one who could take liberties with Karina, even if she seemed to resent them.

At a table in the middle of the room—there were no corners empty—Steele drew Karina into a chair. Sat down himself. A waiter came. He ordered Karina's favorite.

"Sit where you are," he said to her across the table. "Anything can happen now."

As he spoke he felt a movement in the furthest right corner of the room where the light was dim. A hard, round face was fixed on his. Under the shadow of his brows he searched the features of the man across the room.

It was Dayoon, flushed and scowling, as he tried to place the newcomer in his catalogue of crime.

Steele sat quietly, glancing easily around the room, dropping occasional humorous remarks to Karina, who remained stiffly silent. Steele was trying to find a man to answer the description of the one who had left the Cleveland airport with Bernie Dayoon. Nobody seemed to fit. Besides, the light was bad. He might be there among all those people.

From the corner of his eye the Lone Wolf kept watch on the man he knew was Dayoon. At the first move Steele shifted in his chair. Dayoon was raising up slowly.

Steele could see from the hunch of the other's shoulder that a gun was coming. The detective's right hand carelessly fingered his tie where it slid beneath the vest. The end of many miles of man-hunt was at hand.

"Steady, Karina," warned the Lone Wolf. "Stay out of this."

THE atmosphere of the room seemed to thicken. Smoke layers hung blue and choking from the low ceiling. Furtive eyes switched this way and that. Slight movement in Dayoon's corner showed Steele some men and girls pushing their chairs out of the way. Steele's chance was a slim one, even if he beat Dayoon to the shot. His automatic was inches from his fingers.

"He's a dirty dick," screamed Dayoon as he stood up and yanked his gun. "Look, guys—its—"

Steele swept his gun out and shot across his chest. There was a mad scramble for safety. A few girls screamed. Men tipped tables and dragged their women down behind the sheltering tops.

Dayoon's gun went off, but it was split seconds after Steele's shot. The detective's bullet caught the killer in the gun arm under the shoulder. The gun flew free, and Dayoon shouted a bitter curse.

As Dayoon stumbled forward and bent over the table at which he had been seated, another figure rose. It was taller. Steele saw him lift a heavy black gun; taking deliberate aim. The detective fired, driving a bullet into the gunman's right side, and not an instant too soon. The bullet from the other's gun grooved a jagged furrow in Steele's table and buried itself in the paneled wall.

"Come out, both of you," shouted the Lone Wolf, sweeping his gun around the room as he discerned a movement among some of the other gangsters. "Your hands in the air, or I'll give you the rest."

"You got nothin' on me," screamed Bernie Dayoon. "I never done it—I tell yuh—"

"Come out here," the Lone Wolf motioned with his gun at the two killers in the corner, snarling like rats in a trap. He swung his gun then to the crowd along the wall beside him. "Get over on that side," he ordered them, sweeping the way clear to the door. "Hey, there, on the door. Inside here, line up."

The lookout crept in stealthily, and as he reached the room he risked a shot. But Steele was ready for him and broke his leg with a quick stab into the shadow. Patsy, bawling, toppled over into the room, his gun dropping from spasmatic fingers.

"Move," ordered the Lone Wolf now. "Lift them up."

DAYOON and the taller gangster came slowly, furtively, looking for a break. One hand trying to reach even with the other. At the door to the street Steele halted.

"One sign from either of you," he told them, "and I'll spread you both out like a truck ran over you. Move."

"You ain't got a thing on me," roared Dayoon. "I wasn't there."

"You're going back to Cleveland, Bernie," said Steele coldly. "After we get through with you downtown."

"I never was in Cleveland in my life," argued Dayoon, and still his pal remained silent. Their hands came down on the street. Steele's gun was in his coat pocket now, ready. The three of them walked straight to the corner.

At the curb the Lone Wolf halted, spied a taxi and herded his prisoners into it.

"Headquarters," he said to the driver. "Make it snappy."

Bernie Dayoon squirmed continu-

ally in his seat. His companion neither spoke nor looked at the detective. Steele let himself enjoy the peace of the open air, even if it was dusty, after the close shave he had had in Karina's place. They were swinging a corner now when Dayoon quickly reached into his pocket and shot his hand out of the cab window.

"Hey!" shouted the Lone Wolf. "No, you don't. Hey, driver! Back up here."

THE machine came to a halt, backed to the curb and Steele got out. He had half an idea of what he was going to find. Only half. Calling to a street sweeper who stood near-by he had the cover of the sewer lifted. With the sweeper's long handled broom they fished out a small chamois skin sack, tied with a draw string.

Steele hefted it a moment, looked at Dayoon and began to loosen the strings.

"I'll be da——" Bernie Dayoon shouted hoarsely and turned to make a dash for freedom.

Steele's gun came out in a flash and a single shot rang out. Bernie Dayoon, alias Dixon, alias Duncan, jewel thief and murderer, fell face forward to the street, his leg caving in under him from the crash of Steele's bullet. The detective drove the other gangster along to where Dayoon lay.

"Get up you dog," he said. "Maybe you'd rather I'd bat you behind the ear with a spanner wrench the way you killed Maxtil in that ship."

"I didn't mean to do it," begged Dayoon, crawling to a shaky foothold.

Steele paid no attention to him. He was peering into the chamois bag. What he saw was more than he expected. The Craven diamonds. All but the two smaller stones at the ends of the string.

"Where's the others?" demanded the Lone Wolf.

Dayoon paused, glowering at his wounded companion.

"Carney took 'em," he admitted.

"Ho—ho!" exclaimed Steele. "Fine. I knew you'd tip your hand all around, Dayoon. Come on, in the wagon boys. This job will be your very last—and you can kiss the book on that."

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(*Concluded on Page* 128)

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Luz R. Perez, of Puerto Rico, sent me a welcome letter with some advice that I only wish my dangerous profession allowed me to follow:

> The end of THE CRIME OF FU KEE WONG was full of thrilling surprises.
>
> Mr. Van Loan—why don't you really become engaged to Muriel Havens? Maybe she will understand if you tell her you are the Phantom Detective and must risk your life daily.

I am grateful for this kindly interest.

But no—my career as the Lone Wolf enemy of crime excludes me from the normal joys of the average man's existence. I must renounce many things in order to be of service in the grim war against the savage enemies of society's peace and security.

Another excellent epistle is fro Carl Watkins Ahearn, of Denve Col.:

> Gee, your stories sure have the smash and punch!
>
> THE CRIME OF FU KEE WONG gave me the biggest reading thrill I ever got for a slim dime.

Space forbids printing more your welcome notes — but I mus acknowledge especially encouragin letters from the following:

> Henry Hull Wisebander, Tulsa, Okla.; Jack Hinsell, Tampa, Fla.; Harold O. Lordin, Dover, Del.; M. A. Trine, Detroit, Mich.; Alice Mayne Dowell, Jacksonville, Fla.; Robert Cortlandt Fehr, Schenectady, N. Y., and Nathan J. Kahn, Chicago.

Thanks to you all!

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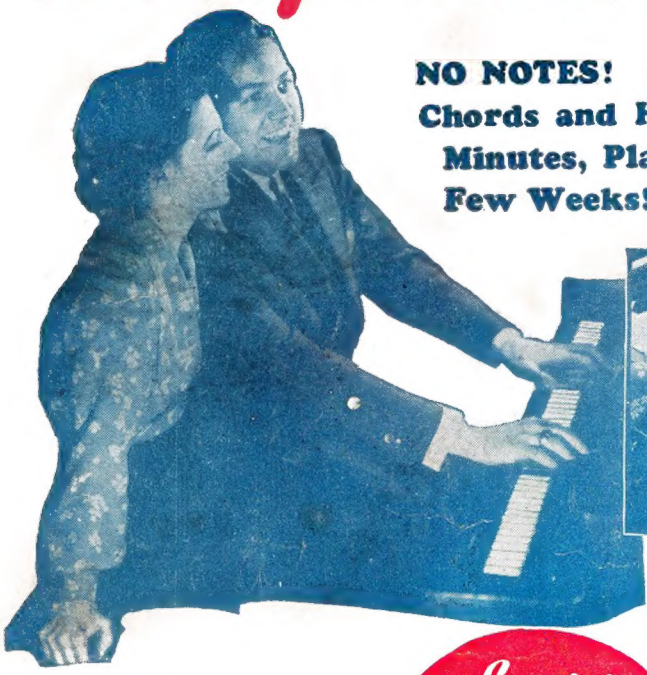
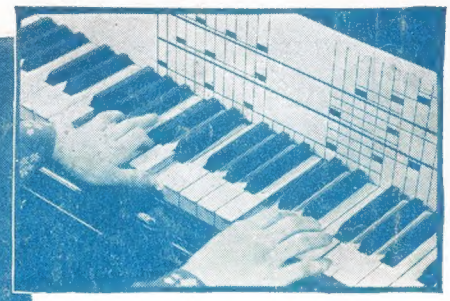

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